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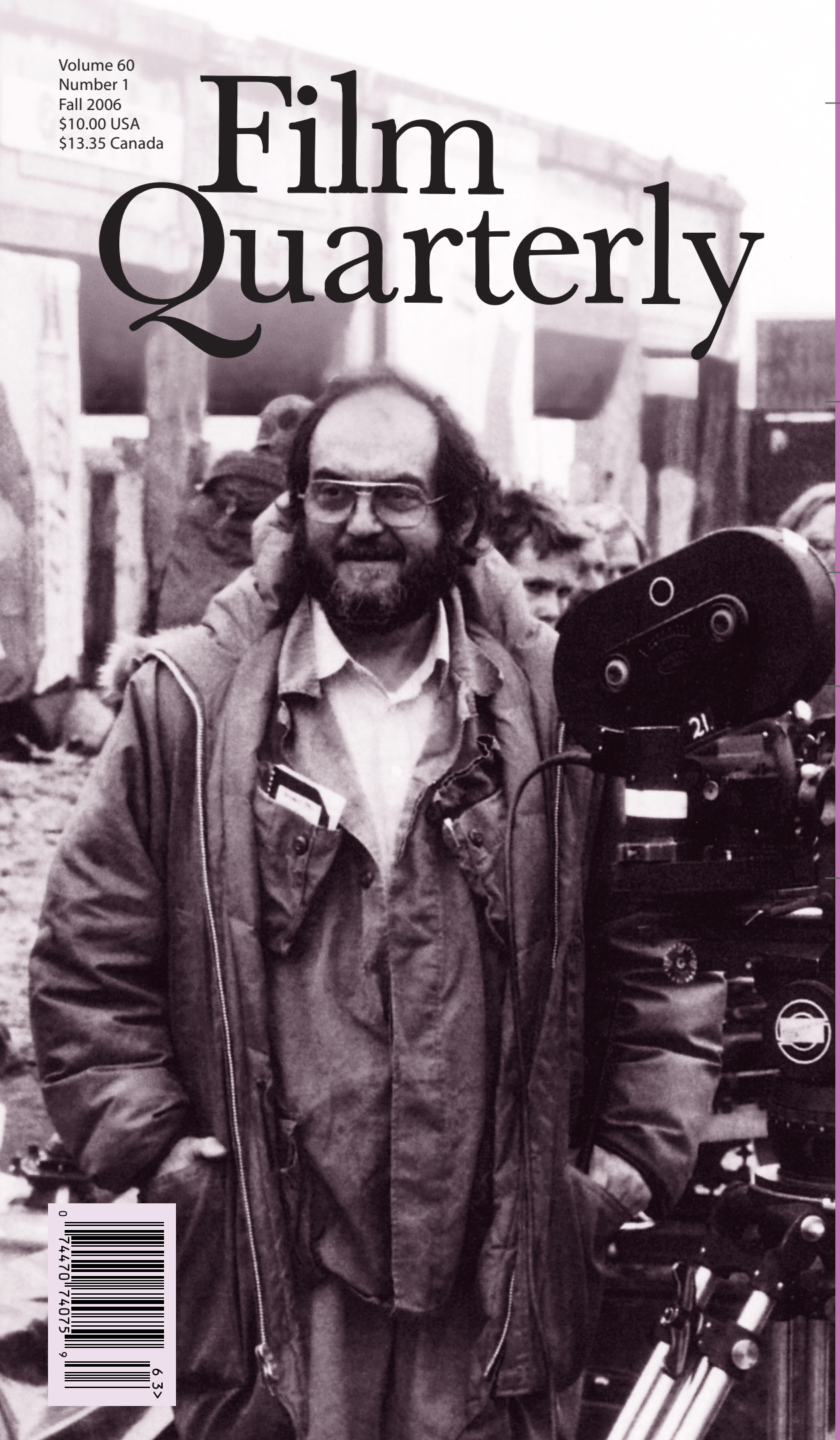

FOCUS ON STYLE AND GENRE IN U.S. CINEMA

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■ CLOSE UP

Greg Marcks

A Credible Witness

SEPARATE FROM POLITICAL analyses and critical assessments, *United 93* (2006) is worth examining for Paul Greengrass's achievement in portraying an artificial reality. The rationale behind his pseudo-documentary approach to delicate historical subject matter is revealed in his DVD commentary to *Bloody Sunday* (2002): "It's not treated in this kind of great, heroic way. It just is what it is." Greengrass makes this cinéma-vérité technique look effortless, but it is incredibly difficult to achieve.

Unlike most films, this one did not begin with a script. Instead, by conducting over 100 interviews with victims' families, Greengrass compiled dossiers on each passenger, the only documents provided to the actors. After two weeks of improvisation and rehearsal, what Greengrass calls a "plausible truth" emerged. At this point a script was written without dialogue (apart from the transcripts of phone calls). For the scenes outside the plane, authenticity was lent through the participation of nine people who played themselves, including FAA National Operations Manager Ben Sliney, re-enacting his harrowing first day on the job.

Most of *United 93* was shot at Pinewood Studios outside London, where three sections of a Boeing 757 were mounted on motion gimbals. Greengrass directed by radio from outside the plane, using monitors to instruct his two cameramen where to focus their lenses. Attempting to create a sense of unbroken reality, Greengrass sometimes shot forty-minute takes, with one camera shooting while another reloaded. In a decade when handheld shots are as common as zooms were in the 1970s, Greengrass's emphasis on historical recreation gives the handheld aesthetic credibility, resulting in a genuine sense of live information capture. This illusion is further reinforced through careful editing, requiring a high shooting ratio (the proportion of footage shot to footage used). Greengrass employed all three editors from his previous features—Claire Douglas, Richard Pearson, and Christopher Rouse—to arrive at what he terms a "jagged syncopation" in the cutting.

Despite its low-tech camerawork, *United 93* contains 483 visual effects shots. Some are obvious (the World Trade Center); most are barely noticeable (paint schemes for the plane exterior). Since security considerations precluded filming at Newark, more than half of the shots involved creating an airport environment for exterior plane shots photographed on a runway in the English countryside. The Newark control-tower set used a digitally created view of Manhattan on greenscreen windows. All of the airplane window shots were greenscreens, with each frame painstakingly generated manually to accommodate Greengrass's impromptu handheld style. To ensure continuity from shot to shot during the final climax, a computer-generated environment of land- and cloudscape was created using aerial photographs. Amazingly, all of this work was completed in just six weeks by U.K.-based Double Negative (in conjunction with five other visual-effects companies).

The "look" inside the plane combines bluish simulated sunlight with greenish fluorescents. The naturalistic impression of sunlight was created through a combination of overexposed windows and movement of the gimbals (allowing the "sunlight" to shift as it does in flight). Barry Ackroyd, BSC, used Fujifilm's new Eterna 500T 8573 stock, a high-speed film that allows for overexposure while still retaining sharpness and accurate reproduction of skin tones. The final image was adjusted using a DI (Digital Intermediate), allowing greater color manipulation than traditional chemical color-timing.

United 93 employs a score by John Powell, one of the film's few overtly cinematic devices. From the outset eerie strings, drums, and haunting vocals imply the film's inexorable outcome. The music ratchets up tension early in the flight, often as counterpoint to the mundane chatter of the passengers, then builds at the film's terrible conclusion. At the end the dialogue is mixed so low it can barely be made out, giving an impressionistic sense of the last desperate seconds of chaos. But Greengrass understands the emotive power of silence and, with the exception of the last sequence, the major shocking, dramatic events are unscored.

A film is the sum total of a million tiny decisions. The ultimate result of Greengrass's choices is a highly convincing representation of reality. Few filmmakers would have even attempted a cinéma-vérité approach to such charged subject matter, let alone succeeded so well. As more 9/11 stories begin to be told (such as Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center*), the attention to detail, the humanistic compassion, and the lack of sentimentality displayed in *United 93* will be all the more apparent.

Greg Marcks is a filmmaker living and working in Hollywood. His latest film, *11:14*, is now available on DVD.

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■ JAMES NAREMORE

Stanley Kubrick and the Aesthetics of the Grotesque

IN THE ANALYSIS of film style, how can we account for such things as tone, mood, and complex emotional affect, all of which are subjectively perceived and describable only with impoverished adjectives?[1] I raise the question because it has special relevance for the study of a director like Stanley Kubrick, whose films are often said to have a "cool" or "cold" emotional tone, presumably expressive of his personality. Kubrick's public image may have contributed something to this reaction. To the world at large he was an intellectual Mr. Cool who seemed to have adopted Stephen Dedalus' strategy —"silence, exile, and cunning"—as a way of dealing with the movie industry and his own celebrity. Some of those who worked with him believed he was misanthropic; for example, one of his early collaborators, the gifted novelist Calder Willingham, wrote that Kubrick's major deficiency in directing *Paths of Glory* (1957) was his "near psychopathic indifference to and coldness toward the human beings in the story. . . . [H]e doesn't like people much; they interest him mainly when they do unspeakably hideous things or when their idiocy is so malignant as to be horrifyingly amusing."[2]

Remarks such as these, plus the many critical references to what Pauline Kael called the "arctic spirit" of Kubrick's films, eventually prompted his friends to come to his defense, assuring us of his love for his family and his deep affection for stray animals and household pets. "I know from dozens of articles and a few too many books that Stanley was considered to be cold," Michael Herr writes in his touching memoir of working with Kubrick on *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), "although this would have to be among people who never knew him."[3] Herr paints a picture of a "gregarious" and convivial man, although he also notes that Kubrick's personality resembled Lenny Bruce's and that he often leavened conversation with sick humor. Where Kubrick's films are concerned, Herr goes to some length to refute charges that the director's reputed coldness eventuated in sterility or lack of feeling—and in fact it does seem odd that anyone who has seen *Lolita* (1961) or *Barry Lyndon* (1975) could convincingly accuse Kubrick of being emotionless.

Herr's arguments aside, several features of Kubrick's style, most of them discussed in the ever-increasing library of books about him, may be said to create an impression of coolness or at least an air of perfectionism and aesthetic detachment. First among these is what *Time* magazine once called the "lapidary" quality of his photographic imagery,[4] which relies upon visibly motivated and rather hard light sources, and which usually favors a deep-focus, crystal-clear resolution, like the world seen through the ground glass of a fine optical instrument such as a Mitchell viewfinder.[5] Kubrick also had a fondness for the wide-angle lens, which he employed in the manner of Orson Welles, to create an eerie, dynamic, sometimes caricatured sense of space. Like Welles and Max Ophuls, he was a virtuoso of the moving camera, except that he usually created a more rigidly geometrical feeling; his tracking movements follow the characters in a lateral direction, traveling past objects in the foreground, or they advance remorselessly down a fearsome corridor toward impending doom, rather like the inexorable march of a military maneuver. Set over against this technique is his repeated use of handheld shots, often positioned at bizarre angles, which usually depict violent combat. The radical shifts between geometrical tracking and skittish, handheld movements are in some ways echoed in the performances of his actors, who depart from cinematic naturalism in two ways: through a slow, sometimes absurdist playing of dialogue, in which equal weight is given to every line, no matter how banal (see the exchanges between astronauts in *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968] and almost all the conversations in *Eyes Wide Shut* [1999]); and through an over-the-top display of mugging (see George C. Scott in *Dr. Strangelove* [1963] and Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange* [1971]). Both techniques have the effect of slightly alienating the audience

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Stanley Kubrick with "Weegee" (Arthur H. Fellig) on the set of *Dr. Strangelove* (1963)

and this alienation is consistent with Kubrick's tendency to eschew melodrama or sentiment. Most of his films are obviously satiric and are focused on flawed, criminal, or even monstrous protagonists.

And yet these important formal and thematic traits strike me as insufficient to explain the effects of certain typical scenes in Kubrick. For instance, exactly what kind of response is appropriate to Dr. Strangelove when he rises from his wheelchair, takes a twisted step, and shouts "Mein Führer, I can walk" with such resonating theatrical ecstasy? Or to Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* when he smashes the Cat Lady's head with a huge ceramic penis? Or to the paralytic Sir Charles Lyndon in *Barry Lyndon* when his gleeful laughter turns into a diseased cough and then into a heart attack? Or to Jack in *The Shining* (1980) when he loudly complains about "the old sperm bank" he has married? To be sure, these moments are blackly humorous, but they also provoke other kinds of emotion—shock, disgust, horror, obscene amusement, and perhaps even sadistic pleasure. To understand their effects and their bearing on Kubrick's so-called coolness, I would argue that we need to examine them in light of what might be called the aesthetics of the grotesque, a term that appears often in literary and art criticism but seldom in film studies. First, however, since in ordinary parlance "grotesque" means simply "hideously ugly," it may be useful if we briefly consider the term's cultural history and implications for poetics.

Unlike many important categories in the history of art, "grotesque" has a fairly specific birth date. It originates sometime around 1500, when excavations

beneath the city of Rome unearthed a series of ornamental wall paintings in which animal, vegetable, and mineral imagery mingled in bizarre fashion, deliberately confusing the animate with the inanimate: human heads grew from trees, the faces of animals were appended to human bodies, garlands of flowers sprang from candelabra, and so forth. The paintings, which had been denounced as "monstrous" and "bastard" by the classical author Vitruvius in the age of Augustus, were discovered in *grotte* or caves, and from this "underground" source derived the adjective *grottesco* and the noun *la grottesca*. Initially the two words referred solely to the ancient style of ornamentation, but not long afterward, the French author Rabelais used "grotesque" to describe deformed or "lower" aspects of the human body. By the eighteenth century in England and Germany, the term had become associated with artistic caricature and it took on purely pejorative or critical connotations. Finally, during the Victorian period, British art historian John Ruskin gave it an important definition that has influenced virtually all subsequent uses. In *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3), Ruskin describes a series of "monstrous" heads, "leering in bestial degradation," which are carved on the Bridge of Sighs and other Venetian landmarks; and from these sculptures, all of them conceived in a "spirit of idiotic mockery," he develops the following theory:

> [I]t seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; that, as one or the other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque and terrible grotesque; but that we cannot legitimately consider it under these two aspects, because there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements: there are few grotesques so utterly playful as to be overcast with no shade of fearfulness, and few so fearful as absolutely to exclude all ideas of jest.[6]

In typical Victorian fashion, Ruskin moralizes the grotesque, admiring the types that belong to the festive, "wayside" culture of medieval peasants and criticizing those produced by the decadent Venetian aristocrats of the renaissance, who created masked carnivals and played "unnecessarily," engaging in "restless and dissatisfied indulgence."[7] He nevertheless finds examples of "noble" grotesque in Dante's *Inferno* and in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *King Lear*. Ultimately, he argues that "there is no test of greatness in periods, nations, or men, more sure than the development, among them or in them, of a noble grotesque; and no test of comparative smallness or limitation . . . more sure than the absence of grotesque invention."[8]

The most elaborate scholarly attempt to explore the full implication of the grotesque can be found in Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, translated into English in 1968, which arrives at the notion (first articulated by G. K. Chesterton) that the form constitutes a psychological strategy aimed at defamiliarizing the everyday world and thereby controlling or exorcizing the absurdities and terrors of life.[9] Another influential theory is developed by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World*, also translated into English in 1968. Bakhtin confines himself almost entirely to the "exuberant" or "carnivalesque" features of medieval Billingsgate and lower-body comedy, which he explains as a popular social ritual devoted to various bodily excesses and directed against "superior powers of the sun, the earth, the king, the military leader."[10] For virtually all later writers, the grotesque is a somewhat broader category associated with both the carnivalesque and the terrifying—at one extreme with gross-out comedy and at the other with the monstrous, the uncanny, or the supernatural. In all its visual and verbal manifestations, however, the grotesque is structured by a dual implication and therefore has something in common with such rhetorical figures as ambiguity, irony, and paradox. Its defining feature is what Philip Thompson describes as an "*unresolved*" tension between laughter and some unpleasant emotion such as disgust or fear.[11] In effect, it fuses laughing and screaming impulses, leaving the viewer or reader balanced between conflicting feelings, slightly unsure how to react.

The problem with such definitions is of course that individual viewers can react differently. In the last analysis, the grotesque is always to some extent in the eye of the beholder and because it involves discordant effects, people sometimes disagree about what things it should include. Exactly what mixture of laughter, fear, and disgust is needed to make something grotesque? To what degree is the grotesque a style or a subject matter? (To Victor Hugo, the grotesque was something that occurred in nature and not simply in art.) Is it an artistic mode, and if so, how does it contribute to such related modes as satire, caricature, and black comedy? In my opinion nobody has given completely satisfactory answers to these questions, although reasonably convincing arguments have been made that the grotesque depends upon a more extreme style of exaggeration than simple caricature and that unlike some types of black comedy, it is exclusively preoccupied with monstrous or repulsive images of the human body. Even so,

satire and caricature frequently employ grotesque imagery and at least one theorist has argued that the grotesque should be understood as a subcategory of black humor.[12]

For most writers on the subject, it would seem that the grotesque is exclusively visual, rendered through pictures or descriptive language. By this account there is no such thing as grotesque music, although when Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* accompanies an evening of rape and "ultraviolence" with his rendition of "Singin' in the Rain," one could argue that the conjunction is grotesque. Some writers, chief among them Thomas Mann, have claimed that modernist literature's tendency to mix genres and tones is essentially a grotesque practice. The most common understanding of the term, however, involves deformed and disgusting representations of the body—especially when they place exaggerated emphasis on the anus, the vagina, or other orifices, or when they depict bodily secretions or fluids. The same could be said of images that mix the human anatomy with something alien—the head of an animal, the legs of a puppet, and so forth. In the cinema, the grotesque can be created with masks, makeup, wide-angle close ups, or simply with the casting of actors who seem grossly fat, emaciated, or ugly in ways that make their faces potentially both comic and frightening.[13]

No matter how the grotesque is achieved, it is not quite identical with the "absurd," at least if we take that term to mean "opposed to reason." Nor is it quite identical with the "bizarre," the "macabre," or the "uncanny," which are usually taken to mean "very strange," "associated with death," and "apparently supernatural." It nevertheless belongs to a family of these and other emotionally laden words with which it can sometimes blend and become confused. Grotesque figures often appear in the theater of the absurd and in ghost stories, and all artistic uses of the grotesque might be said to imply a deep-seated anxiety. One thing is certain: although the grotesque has a long history, artistic modernism, or what the general public once thought of as "modern art," is strongly marked by grotesque effects. Consider, as only a few examples from the literary sphere, Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis," the "Circe" episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*, Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find," Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, and Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*. Where modern painting is concerned, grotesque effects can be seen in the "Exquisite Corpse" drawings of the Surrealists (which are in some ways analogous to the "bastard" forms of the ancient Italian cave paintings) and in numerous images by Picasso and Francis Bacon. The list could be expanded considerably, to the point where the grotesque functions almost as a guarantee of artistic seriousness and authenticity during the first half of the twentieth century. As in previous eras, it has its "sportive" and "terrible" branches, but the terrible dominates. Even so, in high-modernist grotesque we seldom encounter the pure supernatural. Modernism remains at bottom a secular aesthetic, rebelling against genteel beauty, bourgeois realism, and classical decorum; its uses of the grotesque are usually aimed at showing that this is in some sense the way the world actually is or ought to be understood. Its hideous ghosts and monsters therefore tend to be given psychoanalytic explanations or they occupy what Tzvetan Todorov calls the "fantastic" mode, in which events are poised ambiguously between fantasy and reality.[14]

The twentieth century's most influential art form, the cinema, is filled with instances of the grotesque—in slapstick comedies from *The Fatal Glass of Beer* (1933) to *Stuck on You* (2003) and in monster movies from *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) to *Hellboy* (2004). At a more overtly "artistic" level, similar effects can be seen in many celebrated films from Weimar Germany, among them Fritz Lang's *M* (1931), which was influenced by the grotesque caricatures of George Grosz. Indeed the grotesque is important to the entire history of international art cinema; we need only think of Eisenstein,[15] Buñuel, Kurosawa, Polanski, and above all Fellini. (More recent examples are Maddin, Lynch, Cronenberg, and the Coen brothers.) For roughly similar reasons, the modernist-inflected film noir of the 1940s and 50s made use of the grotesque, as did several of the American directors who worked slightly against the grain of classic Hollywood—consider Von Stroheim's *Greed* (1924), Sternberg's *Blonde Venus* (1932) and *The Scarlet Empress* (1934), and especially Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), *Mr. Arkadin* (1954), *Touch of Evil* (1958), and *The Trial* (1962).

All of which brings us back to Kubrick, whose work is shaped by the artistic modernism he absorbed in New York during the late 1940s and 50s, at the very moment when black humor and the theater of the absurd were profoundly influencing American culture. As a young photographer for *Look* magazine, Kubrick not only took pictures of George Grosz but also worked alongside and effectively became a member of the cutting-edge, "New York School" photographic artists of the period, including two specialists in the grotesque: Arthur Felig, aka "Weegee," the first American street photographer to have his work displayed at the Museum of Modern Art, and Diane Arbus, whose career transition from *Harper's Bazaar* to art photography followed

close on the heels of Kubrick's move from *Look* to the cinema. Weegee is often described by art historians as a populist and a documentary realist, but the unsettling force of much of his imagery derives from the way he makes New Yorkers, whether opera-goers or Bowery bums, look like participants in a carnival freak show. Arbus's more sharply disturbing pictures are devoted to people she herself described as "freaks." Susan Sontag, who intensely disliked the "cool dejection" and apparent lack of "compassionate purpose" in Arbus's work, accurately described the bewildered emotions it can produce. "[The] mystery of Arbus's photographs," Sontag wrote, "lies in what they suggest about how her subjects felt. . . . Do they see themselves, the viewer wonders, like *that*? Do they know how grotesque they are?"[16] Similar questions are raised by Kubrick's 1949 magazine study of Greenwich Village boxer Walter Cartier and his twin brother Vincent—a noir-like and vaguely freakish "human interest" project that became a template for Kubrick's early documentary, *Day of the Fight* (1951) and for his second feature film, *Killer's Kiss* (1955). Significantly, Kubrick later hired the aging Weegee as a still photographer for *Dr. Strangelove* and in *The Shining* he quoted Arbus's famously creepy photograph of twin girls.

In this regard, we should also note that Kubrick was the first American director to contribute to the postwar boom in art cinema. *Fear and Desire* (1953), his initial effort at a feature-length project, was distributed by New York promoter Joseph Burstyn, the creator of the U.S. market for Italian neorealism, and it played in the "sure-seater" urban theaters that Barbara Willinsky has identified with the proliferation of art-houses during the same period.[17] A heavily allegorical drama, *Fear and Desire* contains a great many signs of "modern artness," including Soviet-style montage, wide-angle photography, internal monologues, and a sex scene involving bondage and attempted rape. As in most of his subsequent work, Kubrick also employs many of the formal strategies that David Bordwell has shown to be characteristic of the art cinema as a "mode of film practice"—especially the use of actual locations and the sort of expressive "realism" that depends on ambiguity, alienation, angst, and absurdity.[18] What makes the film "artistic" in a specifically Kubrickian sense, however, is its fascination with the grotesque. Its most effective sequence involves a nocturnal military raid in which a group of enemy soldiers are taken by surprise as they eat dinner. Kubrick shows a dying hand convulsively flexing in a bowl of greasy stew and squeezing a wet clump of bread through its fingers. The bodies of the dead, framed from the waist down, are dragged across the floor, their legs splayed at an angle that makes them look like puppets. At the end of the sequence, in an image designed to evoke both disgust and sardonic amusement, we see a large close up of one of the victors as he gulps down a bowl of cold gruel from the dinner table, wipes off his slimy chin, and grins with satisfaction.

Kubrick's next film, the low-budget thriller *Killer's Kiss*, makes this tendency even more evident, particularly when it climaxes with a clumsy duel between a hero named Davy and a villain named Vince in a loft filled with naked department store mannequins. The two men, rivals for a dance-hall girl named Gloria, are armed respectively with a spear and a fire ax, but in the midst of their quasi-gladiatorial combat they pick up female mannequins and begin throwing body parts at one another. At one point Davy tosses the entire body of a woman at Vince, who chops it in half with his ax. Later, Davy pushes Vince down on a pile of female bodies and tries to spear him, in the process getting the weapon caught in the lower half of a woman; as Davy waves the truncated torso around to shake it loose, Vince swings wildly with his ax and shatters the mannequin to pieces. Throughout, the suspense is charged with humor, partly because Kubrick's editing makes it difficult for us to distinguish the real figures from the mannequins, and partly because several of the wide or master shots run for a fairly long time, allowing us to see the sweaty, dusty combatants stumbling, floundering, falling, and growing weary. Whenever I have shown the sequence to students, a few of them break into laughter. Their response seems to me perfectly in keeping with at least part of the effect Kubrick is trying to achieve, in which the horrific, the uncanny, and the sadistically amusing are suspended in an awkward, uncertain equilibrium.

In the history of art photography there are many instances where similar effects are achieved by confounding the animate with the inanimate. Kubrick's idea for the climax of *Killer's Kiss* almost certainly derives from a tradition of surrealist-inspired photos involving department-store mannequins, much of which has recently been documented in a museum catalog, *Puppen, Körper, Automaten: Phantasmen der Moderne*, edited by Pia Müller-Tamm and Katharina Sykora.[19] (Famous practitioners of such photography in the period between 1920 and 1945 include Eugene Atget, Umbo, Hans Bellmer, and especially Werner Rohde, whose images bear a strong resemblance to the ones in the Kubrick film.) There are even older scenes of the type in literature—for example, E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, in which the protagonist, Nathaniel, has fallen in love with an automaton named Olympia, who

is constructed by a Professor Spalanzani. Entering the Professor's house one day, he finds the Professor and an Italian named Coppola battling with one another for possession of the body of a woman:

> Nathaniel recoiled in horror on recognizing that the figure was Olympia. Boiling with rage, he was about to tear his beloved from the grip of the madmen, when Coppola by an extraordinary exertion of strength twisted the figure out of the Professor's hands and gave him such a terrible blow with her, that Spalanzani reeled backwards and fell over the table among the phials and retorts . . . Coppola threw the figure across his shoulder and, laughing shrilly and horribly, ran hastily down the stair, the figure's ugly feet hanging down and banging like wood against the steps.

In his useful monograph on the theory of the grotesque, Philip Thompson quotes these lines to illustrate the way in which something "disconcerting, perhaps even frightening" can also seem "irresistibly comic, not least because of the slapstick nature of the brawl."[20] The comic feeling depends as well on the way the human body is reduced to a clattering stick figure or mechanical object—an image that preoccupied Kubrick throughout his career, most notably in *Dr. Strangelove*, in which the mad scientist is part man and part puppet, in *A Clockwork Orange*, whose very title indicates a grotesque combination of the organic and the mechanical, and in *2001*, in which black comedy arises from a computer with an uncannily human voice and personality.

Kubrick's third film and first true Hollywood production, *The Killing* (1956), differs from its most important predecessor and clear influence, John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), chiefly by virtue of the fact that Kubrick gives us a veritable festival of grotesque imagery, much of it prompted by screenwriter Jim Thompson's sadistic humor and by the large cast of pug-ugly veterans of film noir. Among the players are a couple of newer, even more eccentric personalities. Maurice, the philosophical strong man hired to distract police during a race-track robbery, is Kola Kwariani, a real-life chess player and ex-wrestler Kubrick had known in New York; and Nikki, the sniper who shoots a horse, is Timothy Carey, a Method-trained actor who had previously worked with Elia Kazan. Kwariani has a cauliflower ear, a shaved head, a fat belly, a hairy torso, and an almost impenetrable accent. The ruckus he starts in the racetrack bar is truly carnivalistic—a cross between a Three Stooges slapstick routine, a monster movie, and a wrestling match on 1950s TV. For his part, Carey has a reptilian grin, a habit of talking through his teeth, and the dreamy attitude of the sort of hipster we might encounter in a Jim Jarmusch movie. He seems especially strange in an early sequence involving a conversation with Sterling Hayden at a shooting range somewhere outside the city. The first image in this sequence, accompanied by three rapid explosions of gunfire, is of three identical targets in the shape of comic-book gangsters who frown and point their pistols directly at us. The camera tilts over the targets and we see Carey and Hayden walking forward. As their conversation develops, we become aware of bizarre visual juxtapositions: parked in front of a ramshackle house in the background is an MG sports car and cradled in Carey's arms is a loveable puppy. The three menacing targets in the foreground seem both uncanny and vaguely comical, like the mannequins in *Killer's Kiss*. Hayden launches into a rapid-fire monologue that explains his plans for the heist and at one point during

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Killer's Kiss (Stanley Kubrick, 1955): the fight among the mannequins

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The Killing (Stanley Kubrick, 1956): Timothy Carey, puppy, and target

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The Killing: Elisha Cook, Jr. and Marie Windsor

his long exposition, Kubrick cuts to a dramatic, low-angle close up of Carey, viewed from across one of the targets in the extreme foreground, so that the cute little dog he is holding is framed by two monstrous heads. Carey softly strokes the puppy and reacts to Hayden's speech by leaning thoughtfully over the target and spitting on the ground.

The Killing has often been interpreted as a sort of existentialist parable or as a philosophical commentary on what Thomas Allen Nelson calls the conflict between rational order and contingency.[21] But the film's immediate effect on audiences is emotional rather than philosophical or intellectual. The stolid (and sometimes inaccurate) voice-over narration that provides a time scheme is in ironic contrast to the bizarre imagery, functioning rather like what T. S. Eliot once described as "meaning" in poetry: in the guise of offering rational information, it helps to keep the viewer's mind "diverted and quiet . . . much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house-dog."[22] Meanwhile, the complex temporal disposition of the plot transforms a hyper-rational plan for a robbery into a splintered montage of lurid details or local situations. Consider Sterling Hayden's rubber clown mask —the first of several grotesque disguises in Kubrick, foreshadowing the adolescent thugs who wear phallic noses in *A Clockwork Orange*, the ghostly figure who performs fellatio while wearing a pig mask in *The Shining*, and the orgiastic revelers who wear Venetian carnival masks in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Consider also the more general features of staging and performance in the scenes between Elisha Cook, Jr. and Marie Windsor, in the first of which a little man is posed at the feet of a hugely voluptuous, heavily made-up woman whose size is exaggerated by the wide-angle lens and the placement of her body in the frame. Everything here is caricatured, but at the same time played in a measured style and photographed in a smooth series of mesmerizing long takes that somehow heighten the feeling of a cruel burlesque.

One could go on in this vein, proceeding film by film and noting elements of the grotesque that recur in Kubrick's work: the leering hotel keeper named "Swine" in *Lolita*, the metallically wigged and mini-skirted "Mom" in *A Clockwork Orange*, the grossly made-up "Chevalier de Balibari" in *Barry Lyndon*, the pudgy Japanese men in bikini underwear in *Eyes Wide Shut*, and so forth. The list would reveal that, like Rabelais, Kubrick is interested in scatology; hence his fondness for staging scenes in bathrooms, as in *Lolita, A Clockwork Orange, The Shining, Full Metal Jacket, Eyes Wide Shut*, and even *2001*. By the same logic he is drawn to coarse bodily images, such as the female statuary or "furnishings" of the Korova Milk Bar in *A Clockwork Orange* and the Rabelaisian architectural designs of giant open mouths and other orifices that he commissioned from Chris Baker for *A.I., Artificial Intelligence*. The point to be emphasized is that although Kubrick is normally treated as an artist who deals in big, important ideas, one of the keys to his style lies in his anxious fascination with the human body and his ability, which he shares with all black humorists and artists of the grotesque, to yoke together conflicting emotions, so that he confuses both our intellectual and emotional responses. This aspect of his work became increasingly marked during the course of his career, as Hollywood censorship was liberalized and as he gained greater control over his productions. Again and again he uses grotesque effects to unsettle social norms, whether liberal or conservative, thereby inducing a sort of moral and emotional disequilibrium. The loss of guideposts is probably least evident in *2001*, if only because the

human beings in that film are dwarfed by the immensity of space; but even at the opposite extreme, when his satire is at its most overt and might be taken as a kind of humanism, he creates a troubling emotional ambiguity. The montage of exploding nuclear bombs at the end of *Dr. Strangelove* may not be a grotesque moment, but it works according to a similar principle, so that horror mingles with a sort of detached appreciation of the sublime beauty of sun, sky, and bursting clouds.

In my own view Kubrick's films can be distinguished from those of other directors who make similar uses of the grotesque. For example, he and Orson Welles share not only certain technical mannerisms—especially the wide-angle lens and the long take—but also a love of exaggerated performances and caricatured faces and bodies. The difference between the two is largely a matter of tone or emotional effect. In Welles, the grotesque is Shakespearian, inflected with affectionate, sentimental, and even tragic emotions. When the fat, rumpled Captain Quinlan chews a candy bar in Tana's parlor in *Touch of Evil*, he seems childlike, pathetic, and oddly noble. In *Mr. Arkadin*, when the title character looks down on the grubby, dying Jacob Zouk and chuckles to himself, Zouk asks what he is laughing at. "Old age," Arkadin says, in a tone redolent of *King Lear*. Especially in *Chimes at Midnight* (1966), Welles delights in the earthy, festive pleasures that interested Ruskin and Bakhtin. Kubrick almost never ventures into that territory. For him, it is as if the body is the source of a horror that can be held in check only with a kind of radical, derisive humor (which may explain why his work has always had a strong appeal for adolescent and college-age males who have artistic interests).

Perhaps I can best illustrate and summarize my argument by looking more closely at a single, representative scene. For my purposes, the best choice is the opening sequence of *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)—not because it is the most powerful moment I could select, but because the word "grotesque" appears in the dialogue. Viewers will recall that this sequence begins with a wide-angle traveling shot that retreats in front of Gunnery Sergeant Hartman (Lee Ermey) as he walks 360 degrees around the Marine barrack at Parris Island and inspects the new recruits, all of whom are shaved bald and standing at rigid attention in front of their bunks. Many things about the shot are typical of Kubrick: the long take; the deep focus; the realist lighting that seems to spill from the barrack windows; and above all the dynamically forced perspective and tunnel-like effect created by the wide-angle lens as Hartman moves down the column of men. We are also in a familiar Kubrick world—masculine, militarized, filled with warriors. The photography emphasizes the spit-and-polish cleanliness of the room, in which reflected light shimmers off the bare floor; the clarity, symmetry, and aura of discipline, however, are in uneasy conflict with the slightly weird exaggeration of space, and with Hartman's loud, hyperbolic performance.

Holding himself ramrod straight, Hartman paces forward and glares at the troops, his eyes bulging as he yells out an angry speech filled with curses, obscenity, racist epithets, and vivid scatological imagery. As the sequence develops, things become even stranger. Just when it looks as if Hartman could not get more abusive, we cut to closer views in which he confronts individual soldiers, giving them cartoonish nicknames ("Snowball," "Joker," "Cowboy," and "Gomer Pyle") and terrorizing them with threats, insults, and physical violence. Most of us know from previous Hollywood movies about Marine training that Drill Instructors are supposed to be intimidating disciplinarians, but this one is so shocking that it is not clear how we are

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The opening sequence of *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987)

supposed to take him. (For instructive comparison, see the first ten minutes of *Take the High Ground*, a Cold-War movie about the Marines directed by Richard Brooks and photographed by John Alton at MGM in 1953, which shows the same physical and emotional harassment, the same clichéd character types, and even the same jokes about the difference between a rifle and a gun, but which seems utterly benign. See also Jack Webb's *The D. I.* [1957], which is an important intertext for *Full Metal Jacket*.) Is Hartman completely serious? Is he nuts? Is this the way Marine sergeants really behave, or are we in the realm of satiric stylization, as with *Dr. Strangelove*? Everything the Drill Instructor says is outrageously offensive, but delivered with such theatrical flair and poetic talent for disgusting metaphors that it invites laughter. The movie seems to be hovering somewhere between realism and caricature, and throughout the sequence Hartman throws us off balance because he is revolting, scary, and funny at the same time.

A good deal might be said (and has been) about the sexual implications of Hartman's harangue: his tendency to call his troops "ladies," "queers," or "peter puffers," his reference to the typical soldier's girlfriend as "Mary Ellen Rotten Crotch," and his promise that Marines under his control will have their sexuality channeled into a love for their rifles. Granting the importance of such matters (which *Dr. Strangelove* treats in similar fashion), we should also notice that Hartman subordinates sexuality to an intense preoccupation with bodily secretions, especially shit, which is the prime source of his grotesque verbal humor. His discourse could easily be analyzed in the same fashion as Klaus Theweleit has analyzed the writings of the proto-fascist German *Freicorps* in the first volume of his disturbing study, *Male Fantasies*, where we repeatedly encounter frightening images of mud, feces, and menstrual blood set over against the hard bodies of patriotic soldiers.[23] The whole of *Full Metal Jacket* is constructed by such imagery, culminating in Vietnam's "world of shit," which might seem the binary opposite of the immaculate cleanliness, obsessive order, and tightened buttocks in the opening scene; significantly, however, the first half of the movie comes to a bloody climax in a toilet that Hartman, in inimitable fashion, orders two of his men to clean. ("I want you two turds to clean the head. I want that head so sanitary and squared away that the Virgin Mary herself would be proud to go in there and take a dump!")

From the opening moments, shit is never far from Hartman's mind. As he strides around the barrack room, his veins distending and his face turning red, he tells the recruits that they are "nothing but amphibious, grabasstic pieces of shit" and threatens to punish them until their "assholes are sucking buttermilk." An equally important feature of his raging disquisition has to do with the psychology he uses to transform his men into cold killers. One of his tricks is to elicit an amused and frightened response—which is to say, the response elicited by the grotesque—and then to punish anyone who reacts. When Private Joker (Matthew Modine) mutters a derisive comment in imitation of John Wayne, Hartman races across the room to find the "slimy little twinkle-toed shit Communist cocksucker" that made the remark. "I like you," he sneers when he discovers Joker. "You can come over to my house and fuck my sister!" Almost as soon as this sick joke registers, he punches Joker hard in the solar plexus and drops him to the floor. Kubrick cuts to a fantastically distorted wide-angle close up from Joker's subjective point of view, showing Hartman bending down, pointing his finger, and shouting: "You will not laugh! You will not cry!" When Joker stands up and resumes his rigid position, Hartman warns: "You had best unfuck yourself or I will unscrew your head and shit down your neck!" He then demands: "Lemme see your war face!" Joker wildly contorts his features and tries to give a fearsome yell, but behind his round, scholarly eyeglasses he looks somewhat comical and afraid. As far as Hartman is concerned the effect is insufficiently grotesque. "You don't scare me," he says as he turns away. "Work on it."

Moving down the row, Hartman stops in front of Cowboy (Arliss Howard) and asks: "Are you shook up? Are you nervous?" Cowboy stares straight ahead and shouts, "Sir, no sir!" Scowling contemptuously because "Cowboy" is shorter than the other men, Hartman yells: "I didn't know they stacked shit that high. . . . It looks to me like the best part of you ran down the crack of your mama's ass and ended up as a brown stain on the mattress!" The *pièce de resistance* of Hartman's performance, however, is his sadistic confrontation with the next figure—the tall, fat soldier he dubs "Private Gomer Pyle" (Vincent D'Onofrio). An innocent hick who tries to maintain the rigid posture and blank, straight-ahead stare demanded of the troops, Pyle can't help smiling at Hartman's colorful rhetoric. Hartman looks him up and down, asking: "Did your parents have any children that lived? I bet they were grotesque. You're so ugly you look like a modern-art masterpiece!"

The more insulting Hartman becomes, the more difficult it is for Pyle to stop grinning. "Do you think I'm cute, Private Pyle?" Hartman asks in hysterical rage. "Do you think I'm funny?" Pyle says no, and Hartman yells: "Then wipe that disgusting grin off your face!" Pyle struggles to keep his composure. "I'm going to give

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Full Metal Jacket: brutalizing obscenities

you three seconds, exactly three seconds, to wipe that stupid looking grin off your face," Hartman screams, "or I will gouge out your eyeballs and skull fuck you!" The image of Hartman having intercourse with a skull is so horrible yet so ridiculous that Pyle cannot control himself and he begins to exhibit a kind of panicked amusement. "Get on your knees, scumbag!" Holding his hand at waist level, Hartman commands Pyle to lean forward, place his neck in Hartman's palm and be choked. "Are you through grinning?" he asks as he squeezes the recruit's windpipe. Pyle's grin disappears and his face changes color. "Yes, sir," he gasps. "Bullshit!" Hartman replies. "I can't hear you. Sound off like you got a pair!" When Pyle manages to say "yes" a second time, Hartman releases him. As Pyle returns to his feet, his eyes wild with terror, Hartman warns: "You had best square your ass away and start shitting me Tiffany cufflinks!"

Whether or not the opening sequence of *Full Metal Jacket* is what Hartman would call a "modern-art masterpiece," it probably aspires to that condition. All its visual and verbal techniques are aimed at maintaining an exact style and a convincing picture of military life while at the same time making us cringe and laugh uncomfortably, feeling uncertain about the film's ultimate purpose. In the last analysis, it can be understood both as a meta-commentary on Kubrick's art and as a systematic demonstration of how the grotesque, whether in life or in movies, messes with our minds. The chief irony of the sequence is that even though Pyle's reaction to Hartman seems slow-witted, it resembles the reaction most viewers are likely to have: a bewildered mingling of amusement, fear, and disgust that turns suddenly into outright shock. In contrast with the stony looks on the faces of the other recruits, Pyle's reaction is sensible and sane; only when forced to deny his feelings does he later turn into a murderer and a suicide. His confusion and bewilderment, moreover, are built into the very structure and texture of the film, which is designed to create a world that is both absurd and verisimilar.

This is the world Kubrick repeatedly tried to represent. If some people regard him as cold, it may be because he seldom allows us the comfort of secure

responses. The emotions he elicits are primal but mixed; the fear is charged with humor and the laughter is both liberating and defensive. His control of photography, découpage, and performance creates a sense of authorial understanding without immersion, as if volcanic, almost infantile feelings were being observed in a lucid, rational manner. As in Franz Kafka's fiction, the most bizarre effects emerge from the very clarity with which the imagery is rendered. The result is a clash of emotion—a charged atmosphere that may not be the only virtue an artist can have, but that gives Kubrick's work a good deal of its motivating energy and consistency of purpose. Kubrick's style is therefore more than the sum of his technical propensities and more than his choices of subject matter; it grows out of a unified attitude toward such different issues as war, science, sexuality, European history, and family life. At his best, like many other practitioners of the grotesque, he aims to show a paradoxical and potentially disturbing truth: at the farthest reaches of our experience, extremes meet and transform themselves. The coldest temperatures burn like fire. Especially where the human body is concerned, there is always something potentially comic about horror and horrible about comedy.

NOTES

1. This essay was written for the "Film Style in Question" symposium honoring David Bordwell at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2005. I thank David, the organizers of the Symposium, and the audience in Madison for providing me with an occasion to work through the problems posed by the paper.
2. Calder Willigham quoted in Robert Polito, *Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 406.
3. Michael Herr, *Kubrick* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 36. See also Pauline Kael, "Stanley Strangelove," *New Yorker* 48 (1 January 1972): 50.
4. "The New Pictures," *Time* 67 (4 June 1956): 106.
5. See Alexander Singer's comments on Kubrick's love of the Mitchell viewfinder, quoted in Vincent LoBrutto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1999), 127.
6. "Grotesque Renaissance," in *The Genius of John Ruskin*, ed. John D. Rosenberg (New York: George Brazillier, 1963), 207.
7. Ibid., 208.
8. Ibid., 204.
9. Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).
10. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 352.
11. Philip Thompson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen, 1972), 21
12. See Mathew Winston, "*Humour noir* and Black Humor," in *Veins of Humor*, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 269–84.
13. For a concise survey of different ideas of the grotesque, including those of Victor Hugo and Thomas Mann, see Thompson's book.
14. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973).
15. I am grateful to Yuri Tsivian for informing me that Eisenstein once wrote an essay about the grotesque, which has never been translated into English. Eisenstein's remarks on the subject occur in a lecture on Dimitri Shostakovich's opera, *Katarina Izmailova*, and they seem quite similar to those of Thomas Mann and other writers who argue that the grotesque is a "mixed" form, involving the tragic and the comic, the low and the high. (By this definition, nearly all of Shakespeare and many films by John Ford could be described as grotesque.) When I say that Eisenstein's films are marked by the grotesque, I am referring to a style of caricature that can be found in his work everywhere from *Strike* (1925) to *Ivan the Terrible* (1944, 1958). See Eisenstein's lecture on *Katarina Ismailova* and *La Dame aux Camelias* in *Izbrannye proizvedenia v Shesti tomakh* (selected work in six volumes), vol. 4 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966), pp. 536–604.
16. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 36.
17. Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). Wilinsky suggests that *Lost Boundaries* (1949), produced by Louis de Rochement and directed by Alfred L. Werker, might be considered an American art film, but in qualified fashion; it was originally developed at MGM but ultimately distributed by an independent company.
18. David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th edn, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 716–24.
19. *Puppen, Korper, Automaten: Pantasmen der Moderne*, ed. Pia Müller-Tamm and Katharina Sykora (Dusseldorf, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen: Oktagon, 2004).
20. Thompson, 52.
21. Thomas Allen Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 32–9.
22. T. S. Eliot, "'Difficult' Poetry," in *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1963), 88.
23. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Volume I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

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ABSTRACT "The grotesque," which became a stylistic term in the Italian renaissance and later contributed significantly to all forms of modernist art, can help us better understand the so-called "coldness" often attributed to Stanley Kubrick's films. The whole of Kubrick's art is designed to produce a grotesque clash of emotions, an unstable blending of humor and terror that derives ultimately from anxieties about the human body.

KEYWORDS Kubrick, grotesque, modernism, film style, body anxiety

■ ERIK DUSSERE

Out of the Past, Into the Supermarket
CONSUMING FILM NOIR

IN A SCENE from Thomas Pynchon's book *Vineland*, two young women meet at a California shopping mall called Noir Center, which takes its theme from what one character calls the "weird-necktie movies" of the 1940s and 50s. As the novel describes it, "Noir Center . . . had an upscale mineral-water boutique called Bubble Indemnity, plus The Lounge Good Buy patio furniture outlet, The Mall Tease Flacon, which sold perfume and cosmetics, and a New York-style deli, The Lady 'n' the Lox. Security police wore brown shiny uniform suits with pointed lapels and snap-brim fedoras."[1] Pynchon is making a familiar point here about the way that an omnivorous consumer culture can and will appropriate anything in order to create the illusion of novelty in both products and shopping spaces. The satire suggests that to appropriate the dark themes and images of film noir is the ultimate absurdity; the final frontier of American authenticity has now been paved over and sold to the highest bidder.

However, this dynamic has in fact always been central to the weird-necktie films themselves. The iconography of noir—the world-weary voiceover, the femme fatale, the trenchcoated detective, those brooding urban shadows—is familiar even to those who have never seen even one of the original films. And although these devices are now sometimes employed in the service of camp, the noir style still frequently appears as a marker of seriousness in film, television, comic books, and other popular media. This style continues to connote a kind of unflinching realism and I would suggest that this effect derives in part from noir's self-conscious rejection of the commercial space it inhabits, a rejection that represents consumer culture as the polar opposite of noir.

To attribute any coherent political stance to film noir—a grouping of films that has no movement or organization behind it, a critical category that is endlessly debated—is a tricky business.[2] But most critics will agree that noir positions itself oppositionally, providing a critical viewpoint on American politics of the 1940s and 50s, choosing to portray the underside of the American Dream. The films can frequently be read as a response to failures or contradictions in American institutions of government, society, and economy. Lary May sees the "rebels" of 1950s film and the emergent 60s counterculture as "the children of noir."[3] James Naremore writes that for Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, authors of the first book-length study of the films, "*noir* is not merely a descriptive term, but a name for a critical tendency within the popular cinema —an antigenre that reveals the dark side of savage capitalism . . . noir produces a psychological and moral disorientation, an inversion of capitalist and puritan values, as if it were pushing the American system toward revolutionary destruction."[4] If so, then it is not surprising that leftist critics like Mike Davis and Fredric Jameson have found in noir and the hard-boiled tradition the potential for a critical analysis of American capitalism. Dean MacCannell writes aphoristically that "there is a kind of innocent codependence of film noir sensibility and Marxist criticism, each providing the images and concepts that the other believes it needs."[5] Although not all noir critics are Marxists and not all critics see the films as politically progressive, it is clear that the noir tradition is engaged with the contradictions inherent in the American political economy, with the opposition between democratic ideals and capitalist structures.[6]

Both as a collection of films and as a critical category, film noir has a distinctive and conflicted relationship to the American consumer culture of which it is a part; the underworld that the films invoke is both an indictment and an artifact of capitalism, a populist intervention and a popular entertainment. These films tend implicitly to distance themselves from the artificiality of the movie-making system from which they

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Setting up the supermarket scene in *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944)

emerge; thus the political critique of capitalism identified by noir's Marxist viewers is performed in part through a formal critique of popular film. In this sense, there is an unexpectedly utopian impulse in noir: the suggestion that a filmic encounter with the "reality" of the urban and criminal underworld may also be an encounter with the presence and immediacy that we feel ourselves to have lost when confronted with the apparent artificiality of consumer culture. Because noir offers this promise—which is also the promise of an experience more vital than that of other films—it is important that these films present themselves as "authentic." Through their streetwise attitude, moral ambiguity, and existential reflections on crime and death, they posit for themselves a film world that is less prettied-up than other popular film and ostensibly less commodified. Noir drives this point home by providing a critique of consumption generally and of Hollywood's product in particular.

In their 1955 *Panorama of American Film Noir*, Borde and Chaumeton argue that film noir is specifically dedicated to undermining Hollywood style:

> [A]ll the components of noir style lead to the same result: to disorient the spectators, who no longer encounter their customary frames of reference. The cinema public was habituated to certain conventions: a logic to the action, a clear distinction between good and evil, well-defined characters, clear motives, scenes more spectacular than genuinely brutal, an exquisitely feminine heroine, and an upright hero.[7]

As Borde and Chaumeton go on to explain, these conventions are systematically violated in the film noir cycle. But of course these crime films are themselves offered as entertainments with some sort of mass appeal. Although their serious subject matter and disillusioned tone suggest a gritty, urban realism presumably absent from other Hollywood films, this tough-mindedness is really a kind of authenticity effect created through a set of strictly mannered noir conventions: expressionistic lighting and scoring, hard-boiled dialogue that is formulaic almost to the point of parody, obsessively complex investigations of the past. Noir is gritty realism rendered through a stylized, filmic, and pleasurable mode of representation. Shimmering rain-soaked streets, white-hot gun flares in darkened rooms—these are confections offered to the moviegoer, in a defining case of Guy Debord's observation that "the image has become the final form of commodity reification."[8]

Caught between opposition to and complicity with Hollywood, classic noirs and later neo-noirs have struggled to differentiate themselves from other film

entertainments and from consumer culture as a whole through the assertion that their visions represent an alternative, authentic America—one that has not been "sold out." Part of the particular appeal noir offers for viewers and critics is that its opposition to capitalist structures has a homegrown quality, despite its urban setting. Noir makes its case against American capitalism by presenting itself as representative of a more genuine American spirit: it combines a powerful debunking of American pieties with the vague promise of something better. As Naremore's description of noir as an "anti-genre" suggests, the particulars of the alternative to consumerism offered by these films is hard to pin down; often it seems to exist purely as a force of opposition. But in its evocation of an underworld lurking just beneath the surface of the acknowledged social order, noir taps into a deep American sense that our republic, our real national identity, resides somewhere outside of traditional institutions of government and economy and outside of our inevitable, daily participation in the sphere of consumption. If the content of noir's definition of America remains vague—the hoped-for return of a repressed and indefinable national character—its critical strategy is clear: to disrupt the equivalence between American citizenship and consumer capitalism that has developed in the postwar era.

Because of the way that these films implicitly invoke an abiding, underground American character as resistance to the mainstream consumer culture, I have chosen to focus my readings on films that employ the most distinctly American consumer space, the supermarket. There is already a robust body of film criticism dealing with the relationship between the cinema screen and the shop window, one that has a specifically European lineage—Baudelaire's notion of the *flâneur* as appropriated by Walter Benjamin in his remarkable work on the Paris arcades—and that explores the way cinema emerged within this late nineteenth-century urban shopping environment. I hope to build on this scholarship on film and commerce by examining how, in the context of post-World War II America, film noir encounters the supermarket: the store itself as well as the practices and meanings that derive from it.

In order to trace the historical development of this strategy, I will be looking at three films that use the supermarket as a stand-in for consumer culture as a whole: the classic noir *Double Indemnity* (1944), the revisionist anti-noir *The Long Goodbye* (1973), and the postmodern neo-noir *Fight Club* (1999). Although it is unconventional to treat noir and neo-noir as moments in an ongoing tradition, I do so here in order to show an evolution in which new ideas and technologies in film-making respond to developments in American practices of consumption.[9] Thus, as we move from the 1940s to the 90s, the visual and narrative styles of noir constitute a symbolic space within which questions and issues surrounding consumer culture are debated. Each of the three movies employs the formal and technological tools available to the film medium in order to reflect upon the relationship between noir and the supermarket as competing models for American self-definition. Taken together, they begin to suggest a paradigm for understanding film noir in terms of its ongoing engagement with the development of American consumer culture from World War II to the present day.

THE SUPERMARKET AND THE UNDERWORLD

In the twentieth century, the formation of American political and cultural identity is inseparable from the development of mass consumption. In *A Consumers' Republic*, historian Lizabeth Cohen specifically suggests that not only our private lives but also our relationship to governmental and economic institutions are defined in crucial ways by practices of shopping and buying. She argues that this phenomenon has its roots in the depression era but only emerges fully after World War II, when it becomes possible to think of Americans specifically as "citizen-consumers." Cohen's analysis details the many formations this relationship between citizen and consumer has taken, and the cultural and political effects it has created in permeating the whole range of American experiences from the postwar era onward: "in the aftermath of World War II a fundamental shift in America's economy, politics, and culture took place, with major consequences for how Americans made a living, where they dwelled, how they interacted with others, what and how they consumed, what they expected of government."[10] Within this tectonic shift, consumption becomes not just another cultural practice, but a way of understanding and organizing national identity.

The evolution of this consumers' republic runs parallel to the evolution of the supermarket, which can serve as a kind of microcosm for American consumer culture. In her history of "the invention of modern shopping," Rachel Bowlby cites the 1932 opening of the Big Bear store in Elizabeth, New Jersey, as the birth of the supermarket. Big Bear was really a discount warehouse, but its focus on self-service and on stocking household goods for low prices signalled a break with the previous model for large-scale shopping, the department store. Whereas the department store was international and cultivated an ambience of aristocratic luxury, the supermarket was an American invention de-

signed to present an aura of pragmatism and democracy. It marked a movement away from urban centers toward a suburban, car-oriented lifestyle and a movement from marketing aimed at bringing glamour to the middle class to the marketing of affordable food and sundries to the masses.[11]

This distinction is real, but it also has a powerful symbolic dimension. Bowlby writes: "The department store is considered to be feminine, frivolous, French, and fashionable; in its Parisian form, it is one of the emblems of nineteenth-century modernity for Walter Benjamin's retrospect. . . . The supermarket, massive and materialistic, figures as an American invention."[12] In *Shelf Life: Supermarkets and the Changing Cultures of Consumption*, Kim Humphery notes that the modern supermarket's "absurd, almost surreal field of 'choice'" is, like consumer culture in general, "bound up with values of freedom and self-determination." Since these values are central to American self-definition, it is appropriate that, as Humphery notes, "the supermarket may have emerged as a cheap and efficient alternative to the traditional grocery store, but within two decades it . . . had become a symbol of all that was American."[13] The distinctly American characteristics of the supermarket, then, are its emphasis on consumption made available to a mass market (signifying a kind of democracy) and its enormous range of choices (which carries the symbolic promise of freedom and independence). These qualities, and our conflicting feelings about them, are also emphasized in the metaphorical uses of the institution, as when we talk about the "supermarket of ideas." Such metaphors are meant to conjure a sense of impressive range and also of a distasteful materialism, both associated with the deeply held American belief in the sovereignty of individual choice.

In this way the word "supermarket" itself has become shorthand for American consumer culture. By the 1940s, it was becoming the "dominant food-selling form in the United States,"[14] and in the postwar period, when the U.S. emerged as the world's primary economic power, it spread rapidly to European countries as well, along with the whole gamut of American products and popular culture—including the films that would eventually acquire the label "noir." In fact, the critical definition of noir itself emerges out of the postwar spread of American consumer culture. French critics used the phrase "film noir"—which had previously been applied to some French films of the 1930s—to describe many of the American films that arrived *en masse* in Parisian cinemas after the years of the Nazi occupation, as part of a larger influx of American consumer products.

One of the films that arrived in France as part of the first wave of American imports was Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*, originally released in 1944. Adapted from a novel by James M. Cain and with a script by Wilder and Raymond Chandler, it provides an example of the classic film noir and of how the noir themes and styles were employed in order to comment on World War II-era consumer culture. This commentary is most visible in the much-discussed "Jerry's Market" scenes, two extended sequences in which Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) and Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) meet at a local supermarket, first to plan the murder of Phyllis's husband and later to deal with the fallout from the murder. In the latter scene, the film's plot has reached an especially tense moment, with Neff, who has grown wary of his partner in crime, arguing that they should stop trying to collect the insurance money and Phyllis angry that Neff has been spending time with her stepdaughter.

The scene begins with an establishing shot from above, showing the tidy geometry of the store and the people with carts winding among the aisles. During the next few minutes we slowly move closer to Neff and Phyllis and their surroundings dominate the screen less, but the supermarket continues to intrude on their conversation, in the form of passing shoppers and store employees—none of whom pays any attention to their frantic whispering. After several interruptions, as they stroll the aisles in a forced parody of shopping, the two end up divided by an aisle stacked so high with products that the camera has to give us a Neff's-eye view, looking slightly down at Phyllis. This separation by consumer goods is the point: Neff wants to turn back, to rejoin the citizen–consumers in the banal communal space of the supermarket, but Phyllis makes it clear that there is no turning back and then Wilder makes it even clearer. The camera moves in for a stunned close-up on Neff and for the first time the supermarket recedes completely as his face fills the screen and his voice-over resumes, keying a fade to Neff sitting in the dark insurance office, recounting the story.

This scene sets out the opposition between supermarket and noir in the clearest possible terms. Its visual impact comes not only from its contrast with the scenes that precede and follow it—the bright interior space of the store as opposed to the dark insurance office after hours—but from the contrast between the store and the two characters who have made it the backdrop for their drama. Wilder uses the cheery mise-en-scène of the supermarket, with its bustle of polite shoppers and its orderly rows and pyramids of products, to throw his noir characters into relief. In doing so,

Double Indemnity: the space of the supermarket . . . and the forced parody of shopping

he makes use of the film medium's particular capabilities. Unlike radio or the written word, film is ideally suited to representing the space of the supermarket. As Anne Friedberg suggests in *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, shopping and film spectatorship each require a gaze that is simultaneously virtual and mobile, a gaze that originates in the nineteenth-century practice of *flânerie* and organizes a whole range of visual practices throughout the twentieth century.[15] Both the film and the supermarket are inherently concerned with visual display and the organization of space, and both offer the aesthetic novelty of their design for the viewer's or shopper's perusal and delectation. Minus the two main characters, this scene from *Double Indemnity* could perhaps serve as a promotional film for the presentation of products in the modern supermarket, circa 1944.

Wilder uses the opposition between the aesthetics of noir and supermarket to create a more subtle opposition: between noir and the rest of Hollywood film. In Jerry's Market, our two stock figures from hard-boiled noir, the femme fatale and the doomed sap who falls for her, are hopelessly out of place. Barbara Stanwyck in particular, with her platinum wig and dark glasses—look at me, I'm in disguise!—appears loaded to excess with signifiers of femme-fatality when placed among the shopping housewives and the neat aisles stocked with baby food and macaroni.[16] The noir woman is especially alienated here because the supermarket shopper is always imagined as a woman, but a passive and receptive female consumer rather than the flinty, tough-talking Phyllis. For James Naremore, Phyllis is essentially continuous with the supermarket because her femininity is packaged and mass-produced: she is "visibly artificial," with a "cheaply manufactured, metallic look."[17] But to the extent that she is visibly artificial, she is also visibly parodic: Phyllis's evident artificiality refers us mockingly to the unacknowledged

Double Indemnity: the femme fatale under neon light . . . and the return to noir

artificiality of Hollywood femininity in general. In the same way, the bright, mass-produced emptiness of the store stands in for the bright, mass-produced emptiness that, the film suggests, Hollywood typically produces.

This visual disjunction suggests that Walter Neff and Phyllis Dietrichson can no longer inhabit the same world as the "real" shoppers. Noir plotlines frequently evoke an underworld of crime, passion, and perversion that lurks beneath and alongside the world of respectable daily life. The plot typically begins with an apparently discrete event—a single death, a wrong turn, a flirtation—that leads the plot outward to reveal or initiate an expanding web of lawlessness and corruption. In this sense, the noir underworld has the same function as the frontier in the Western genre; it is a liminal space where conflicts in American law and society can be dramatized in life-or-death terms.[18] In *Double Indemnity*'s supermarket drama, the robust consumer society of the 1940s is haunted by two characters who inhabit that underworld. Neff and Phyllis have crossed the noir frontier and seem almost invisible to the respectable citizens who surround them, shoppers whose citizenship is constituted here not in any official or institutional relationship, but in their status as consumers.

In fact, the citizen–consumers are almost entirely oblivious to the two murderers in their midst, an implicit commentary on the supermarket as a new kind of social space organized around consumption and commodity fetishism. Kim Humphery cites a retail expert who suggested that in the new self-service stores "the package is an extremely important substitute for the personal relationship that people desire." Thus, as Humphery notes, "the notion of inanimate objects and physical spaces as the means by which to preserve, albeit in altered form, the communicative, social aspects of the shop was central to the development of the supermarket."[19] The space of Jerry's Market is ostensibly communal, but in fact the scene as filmed emphasizes the privatization and commercial purpose of the space, focusing our attention on barriers and awkward silences in order to suggest a "lonely crowd" of people lost in private reverie and communing only with their potential purchases. The noir underworld is presented as more vivid than the bland comforts offered by citizenship: the shoppers are docile shades, lacking the urgency and passion that motivate the conversation between Neff and Phyllis.

As the use of the supermarket in *Double Indemnity* shows, the noir conjunction of aesthetics and ideology is motivated at some level by the rise of consumer culture in the postwar era and the increasing conflation of consumption and citizenship that this rise entailed. The juxtaposition between the underworld and the supermarket also figures noir's oppositional stance in relation to Hollywood film, in a specific instance of the general undermining of popular film convention described by Borde and Chaumeton. *Double Indemnity* thus presents itself as more unflinching and "authentic," in its dark themes and cynical attitude, than other Hollywood movies of the time. It is in this sense that noir is countercultural; it sets up a contrast between two versions of the nation, the mainstream consumer culture and the underworld of the deviant and dispossessed. Noir becomes the site of an American identity that is both alternative and central, the underground retreat of our true national character, a retreat that is itself outside the social and imaginative space of citizenship because it rejects the equation of citizenship with consumption.

FILM NOIR IN THE CULTURE SUPERMARKET

The era of classic film noir ended in the late 1950s, but in the New Hollywood of the early 70s, filmmakers began to reevaluate American film genres and icons through the lens of a national culture changed by the new social movements associated with the 60s. Alongside the more visible political movements—including the civil rights movement, second-wave feminism, and gay liberation—the 1960s produced a new wave of consumer advocacy that challenged practices in corporate marketing and production as manipulative and corrupt. The consumer culture identified with the supermarket, and specifically its relationship to the woman as shopper, was often described as a form of conspiracy or brainwashing. In Jennifer Cross's 1970 book *The Supermarket Trap*, she argued that American housewives were enmeshed in a plot constructed by marketers through the advertising and packaging of their products; the supermarket is a "bewildering, enticing, craftily packaged trap that awaits every housewife during her weekly shopping expeditions. . . . The contest is not an equal one, largely because most people are unaware that the trap exists, and of the competitive conditions within the food industry that sprung it, the marketing techniques that bait it so cunningly."[20]

This vision of the supermarket as conspiracy is realized on film in the 1975 film version of *The Stepford Wives*, in which a supermarket serves both as the communal center of the suburban Connecticut town of Stepford and also as the site where the film's anxieties about gender, conspiracy, and consumption are staged in their creepiest form. The town's housewives are replaced one by one by compliant and physically

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The Long Goodbye (Robert Altman, 1973): Marlowe and his neighbors

enhanced robot versions of themselves, designed and constructed by an ex-Disneyland engineer; the tools of the marketing apparatus are being used to literally reshape women. In the film's final scene, the robot wives shop and greet each other vacantly. As they push their carts among the perfectly stocked aisles, the 1960s reading of the supermarket has its apotheosis: a brightly lit space in which the colorful products are purchased by pretty automatons who are themselves the ultimate product of the consumer society. In this sense, perhaps the film's sneakiest suggestion is that men in positions of power fear feminism not only because it might ruin women as wives, but because it might ruin them as consumers. And although *The Stepford Wives* is itself an unlikely candidate for the neo-noir canon, it does contain at least one suggestion that the noir tradition offers an alternative to the artificial America of the suburbs: in this film about men conspiring to create more perfect shoppers, the only sympathetic male character is an ex-boyfriend named Raymond Chandler.

But films of the era that sought specifically to reckon with the legacy of noir did not generally give Chandler such gentle treatment. In the cultural context of the 1970s, the hard-boiled noir narrative—with its retrograde gender politics and its masterful detectives—could only seem hopelessly old-fashioned. The only way to revisit noir was as a kind of anti-noir, such as Robert Altman's irreverent adaptation of *The Long Goodbye*, in which Raymond Chandler's private eye Philip Marlowe has been uncomfortably transplanted to 1973. Since the classic era of film noir had ended fifteen years earlier, the hard-boiled detective–hero had to be revived specifically in order to be reconsidered or parodied, allowing a director like Altman or Roman Polanski (in *Chinatown* [1974]) to create a commentary on an earlier mode of filmmaking.

Not only is Marlowe out of place in the Los Angeles of the 1970s—represented by the spacey members of the women's commune next door, who spend their time baking pot brownies and doing yoga in the nude—but the style of the film is itself a rebuke to the classic films it parodies. Altman uses Chandler's novel as a source and Leigh Brackett, who worked on the 1946 version of Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, wrote the screenplay; but the movie pointedly does not use a film noir style. Rather, it is made in the Altman style—with lovely, inventive cinematography by Vilmos Zsigmond. The camera pans and zooms and is kept wandering at all times (perhaps suggesting the shopper's mobile, distracted gaze), while the film image is "flashed" to minimize strong contrasts of light and dark. The narrative itself is loose and improvisational, and the casting and performance of Elliott Gould emphasize this looseness: he plays Marlowe as a lost, laconic hipster who mumbles to himself and whose tagline is "it's OK with me."

In this context, the opposition between noir and supermarket is considerably less clearly defined than in *Double Indemnity*. Instead, Altman's attitude toward consumer culture is largely bound up with his attitude toward Hollywood as a factory for the mass-production of images, including images from the noir tradition that he parodies. The film begins and ends with a tinny, old-fashioned version of the song "Hooray for Hollywood," one that suggests that the Hollywood in which past incarnations of Marlowe lived is archaic and outdated by letting us hear the scratches on the recording, as if we were listening to an old 78-rpm disc. The first specific reference to noir itself comes in the form of a Hollywood security guard who specializes in impressions of movie stars—beginning with the Barbara Stanwyck of *Double Indemnity*. Film noir is accorded no special status here as a site of neglected American values; it is simply part of the larger movie-making industry, another artifact of the studio system.

This point is emphasized by Altman's undermining of noir conventions. In opposition to the complex and

tightly patterned plots that characterized the 1940s noirs, we are given a shaggy-dog story of a plot and a detective who seems to belong in the supermarket as much as he belongs anywhere. The film contains long, digressive scenes that do nothing to advance the narrative, and it ends abruptly on an act of sudden and absurd violence that violates any desire for consistency or closure. Meanwhile, although there is in fact one deceitful woman in the film, Altman perversely casts a fickle and brand-conscious cat in the role of femme fatale. These choices seem indebted to a French New Wave tradition that is interested not in straightforward social criticism but rather in an interrogation and violation of genre conventions. This tone is set in the scene that plays out during the film's opening titles: Marlowe, in search of food for his cat and brownie mix for his neighbors, wanders the aisles of a local supermarket late at night in his 1940s suit, smoking his perpetual cigarette. Meeting this Marlowe—addled, anachronistic, running household errands for finicky pets—it is clear that he is precisely not the paragon of hard-boiled American manhood so lovingly created by Chandler. The dingy store and fluorescent lights themselves present a contrast with Wilder's bright stacks of commodities, and the film is casually cynical about consumer culture: when Marlowe asks for a particular brand of cat food, a store employee gestures at the rows of different brands and points out that "all this shit's the same anyway"—a phrase that neatly sums up Altman's feeling about Hollywood.

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The Long Goodbye: the hard-boiled, bachelor detective goes shopping

So the model set up by *Double Indemnity*, in which consumer culture and noir underworld are placed in stark opposition, no longer holds up in *The Long Goodbye*. Nor is noir seen as a unique space in which Hollywood conventions are contested, as in the model described by Borde and Chaumeton. Instead, Altman suggests that noir and supermarket are parts of the same system, and to put the detective in the macaroni aisle is only to show how the Hollywood production system is a part of the "culture supermarket." As in *Double Indemnity*, the visual practices of filmmaking and film viewing are linked to visual practices of shopping and store display. But Altman's revisionist approach to noir implies that these two kinds of visual pleasure are the same, that the Hollywood film viewer is always a shopping consumer. So here the potential for authenticity, for providing a critique of the culture supermarket, resides not in the noir style or narrative, but in the style of New Hollywood directors like Altman—with nods to Godard and to the cultural politics of the 1960s—whose demystification of classic Hollywood film is linked to his era's distrust of the consumer society.

A MAP OF THE SUPERSTORE

Although 1970s movies such as *The Long Goodbye* suggested that film noir was no longer relevant except in revisionist modes, noir styles and themes underwent a full-scale revival beginning in the 1980s. Since then a whole new cycle of films loosely classified as "neo-noir" have appeared, ranging from the nostalgic revisiting of James M. Cain in *Body Heat* (1981) to the bluescreen visual pyrotechnics of *Sin City* (2005). The film I am considering here, David Fincher's 1999 *Fight Club*, has few of the obvious plot elements we associate with classic noir: no detective, no murder, no heist gone wrong. Rather, Fincher gives us the alienated mood, the stylized "realism," and the skepticism about the American mainstream that we recognize as noir, translated into the context of the 1990s, a moment with its own set of shopping spaces and film techniques. In its use of noir-derived visuals, themes, and meanings, *Fight Club* extends the concerns I have raised about film noir and its relationship to consumer culture into the contemporary imaginative space that we generally refer to as "the postmodern."

Like *The Long Goodbye, Fight Club* is in many ways a self-referential movie. But instead of taking a critical attitude toward classic film noir, it blends elements of noir narrative with a flashy contemporary visual style that is indebted to MTV and television commercials. The film suggests that American culture is entirely suffused

Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999): the supermarket is everywhere

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by commerce; there is no need to go to the supermarket because the supermarket is everywhere. The concerns about marketing in the 1960s have become a conspiracy that is both ungraspably huge and so pervasive that our identities are completely inhabited by it. As we are given a computer-generated tour of a trash can full of branded packages, the cynical, noir-style voice-over comments: "when deep-space exploration ramps up, it'll be the corporations that name everything: the IBM stellar-sphere, the Microsoft galaxy, the planet Starbucks." The hyperbolic claims about interstellar branding are meant to provide a sense of the enormous scale of global capitalism. In this context the *actual* supermarket is no longer a site of struggle or paranoia; rather *Fight Club* transfers the techniques associated with the supermarket—vast and excessive consumer choice, visual and spatial organization, the package as a substitute for social relations—to a scene of virtual shopping. In a famous early scene, the main character, "Jack" (Edward Norton), enters the world of an IKEA-style catalogue, populates a room with furnishings, and then strolls through it while prices remain floating in the air around his belongings. By representing Jack's apartment as a commercial space in itself, the scene suggests that there is no longer any space, in the workplace or the home or the mind, outside the reach of consumer culture.

This apparition of the endless supermarket is the starting place for the film's most obvious political point. The plot follows Jack and his alter ego Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) as they create their own noir underworld in the form of a "fight club," a secret society that meets in dimly lit urban basements, where men who feel alienated or disenfranchised find both selfhood and community through the experience of physical pain. The fight club ultimately metamorphoses into "Project Mayhem," a decentralized guerrilla underground dedicated to undermining the foundations of America's consumer society. This movement appears to update past models of political action for the 1990s; its tactics —combining quasi-military attacks on property and financial institutions with a prankster spirit—recall 60s-era groups such as the Weather Underground.

But although the content of the film suggests an attack on the supermarket based on 1960s political models, the form of the film has a different agenda. Putting new technologies of representation in the service of its political project, *Fight Club* evokes the cyberspatial landscapes and networks of the Internet, and ultimately constructs a genuinely postmodern political model, in which it is only possible to create an effective resistance to consumer culture by using the tools of consumer culture. The film suggests that in the era of late capitalism it is only possible to counter the resilient, amorphous networks of global commerce by working within them. In doing so, it suggests something akin to Fredric Jameson's call for an aesthetic strategy of "cognitive mapping" as the form of an oppositional postmodernism. For Jameson, it is only through representing and interrogating the new *spatial* arrangements created within the "decentered global network" of multinational capital that literature or film can speak politically to the world we inhabit.[21] *Fight Club* takes a similar approach; using the techniques of computer-generated imagery (CGI) and photogrammetry, the film constructs a visual landscape that is both spatial and virtual: a map of consumer culture's imprint on Jack's mind and self.

This attention to mapping is literalized in the use of photogrammetry in *Fight Club*. Originally used in nineteenth-century France to create topographical maps, this technique involves the use of multiple photographs to build a three-dimensional photographic image. With the advent of digital imaging technology, photogram-

metry can be used to produce a photographic map of any given space, which can then be manipulated endlessly by film technicians, often in combination with CGI. *Fight Club* employs this capacity for a wholly virtual camera gaze—in which the distinction between cinematography and mise-en-scène disappears entirely—in order to survey the spaces we inhabit and the objects that surround us: buildings, apartment interiors, offices, trash cans, the human brain. This effect, like the scene of Jack shopping, mimics the practices of catalogue or Internet shopping, in which the spectator-as-shopper can go anywhere, zoom in, inspect the potential purchase from multiple angles. In doing so, *Fight Club* deliberately foregrounds its status as medium, employing visual effects that are both pristine and deliberately unrealistic. The film recognizes its status as commercial product but eschews the anti-narrative stance of *The Long Goodbye*. Rather it embraces the technological and stylistic innovations of advertising, MTV, and commercial filmmaking in order to suggest the vast and intricate contours of the supermarket conspiracy and the possibility of resisting that conspiracy from within. *Fight Club*—which begins with a flashy CGI tour of the brain's neural map—insists that the supermarket has inhabited our beings at the deepest level. Thus it requires Jack's harrowing, schizoid struggle with Tyler just in order to cast off the chains of consumerist identity within himself and regain his manhood.[22]

The film's focus on Jack's divided psyche presents an allegory in which masculine identity is asserted as a site of resistance to the new structures of contemporary consumerism, an allegory that takes the form of a struggle for (male) selfhood. Without his conscious knowledge, Jack has created Tyler Durden as a virtual alter ego—a hypermasculine dream self, a film self built out of pure identification—who challenges him and does things he is too timid to do. Tyler delivers lectures on the evils of consumerism and of the softness inculcated in a generation of "men raised by women"; at the moments when Jack hesitates, Tyler challenges him with a painful initiation rite or a test of courage. He is Jack's idealized vision of manhood, a perfect father and buddy and self, and as such he is also a creature of film. As in *Double Indemnity* and *The Long Goodbye, Fight Club*'s relationship to consumer culture is also a reflection on the status of film as commodity. But although the content of the movie is a fairly straightforward attack on consumerism and assertion of authentic masculinity, Fincher's formal postmodernism marks a difference from the other two films in that it questions the possibility of a position outside the system—the supermarket, Hollywood—from which one might construct an "authentic" critique.

Tyler's status as a filmic construction and commentary on Hollywood heroes is made clear by the way the movie surrounds his presence with moments of self-reference. Tyler works as a film projectionist, where he engages in some guerrilla splicing, adding frames from pornographic movies to Disney-style family fare. Here Tyler appropriates "subliminal" techniques, associated with paranoia about the ability of advertisers to manipulate the public, for a prankster assault on the Hollywood mainstream. Moreover, as Lucy Chen observes, "*Fight Club* first introduces Durden as a series of scratchy, flickering images 'subliminally' spliced into the background of the film."[23] This is partly a representation of Tyler's gradual infiltration of Jack's unconscious, his subversive presence in the film, but the association of subliminal images with advertising also suggests that Tyler is himself a construction of consumer culture—a suggestion that the casting of Brad Pitt, one of Hollywood's most reliable star commodities, highlights nicely.

In these self-conscious moments, Fincher repeatedly draws attention to *Fight Club*'s status as film, too—and in doing so undermines its own apparent argument for masculinity as a site of political resistance. In one of Tyler's motivational speeches about the evils of consumerism—"you're not the car you drive; you're not the contents of your wallet; you are not your fucking khakis"—the film appears to shake until the sprocket holes on the sides of the celluloid become visible. In the scene of Tyler as projectionist he points to a dot in the corner of the frame in order to illustrate how projectionists know when to change reels. This "changeover" is later linked to the change—which, like the reel change, is invisible to the audience—from Jack to Tyler and back that occurs throughout the film, again emphasizing the sense that Tyler, as Jack's alter ego, is a creature of the film medium, with its unique capacities for fantasy and identification. This self-referential approach is not merely the familiar wink of the postmodern; rather than remaining a clever stylistic tic, it presents us with an unresolved tension between authenticity and artifice. Tyler is presented as the figure who will return men to their natures by resisting the consumer culture that has emasculated them. But the film is also aware that what Tyler offers is *not* nature but rather a set of cultural traditions—of embattled masculinity, of the solitary individual resisting the system, of a particular attitude of unsparing cynicism—that are

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Fight Club: neo-noir self-referentiality

drawn from the filmic past and from the memory of film noir's attempt to locate an authentic American identity outside of the engulfing supermarket.

Each of the three films I have discussed is engaged on some level with the aesthetics and ideology of noir, and each is searching for a position outside the mainstream of American consumer culture, for which the supermarket is an emblem. Each confronts the problem—which is also represented as the problem of the films' relationship to the larger Hollywood movie-making system and film as commodity—in a different and historically located way. In a classic film noir like *Double Indemnity*, the noir aesthetic is itself a site of resistance from which to provide a critique of consumer culture and popular film forms. For Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, made after the decline of the studio system, noir itself is hopelessly compromised as part of a mass-production system that can only be seen critically in retrospect. *Fight Club* suggests that everything, itself included, is compromised, but not hopelessly; employing a postmodern model of engagement, it seeks to resist consumerism through a kind of serious formal play, from within the belly of the beast.

The readings I have provided here argue that film noir's response to American capitalism takes place in the fluorescent aisles of consumer culture. Noir is the vehicle by which American film from the postwar period to the present stages the tension between two visions of national identity: on the one hand the pervasive everyday practices of consumer society, on the other the dream of an essential, undefinable America that exists somewhere on the margins, resistant to government and global capital alike. But in each of my three examples, this oppositional stance is complicated by the film's self-conscious reflection upon itself as a visual commodity. In each case, the political engagement of the film is tied uncomfortably to its complicity in consumer culture, its status as an image that, however raw or disturbing it may be, has a lineage in the shop window and a kinship with the supermarket display. If these films offer a critique of the models of citizenship provided by consumption, it is one that emerges from within the culture as a ghost in the machine, a glitch in the republic—a critique made possible by the commodified image's uneasy reflections upon itself.

NOTES

Many thanks to those who read or listened to versions of this essay and provided suggestions: Lisa Gitelman, Stephanie Hartman, Amy Holberg, Jonathan Kahana, Lisa Lynch, Jeff Middents, Abby Moser, and Elena Razlogova.

1. Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (New York: Little, Brown / Penguin, 1990), 326.
2. Credit for applying the term "film noir" to American films of the 1940s is usually given to Nino Frank, who published an article on the new "*policiers*" in 1946. In the same year, Jean-Pierre Chartier's essay "Les Américains aussi font des films 'noirs'" appeared. The first book-length study of the subject is the now-classic *Panorama du Film Noir Américain*, published in 1955 by Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton. James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), provides an excellent overview and interpretation of the origins of the term in his chapter "The History of an Idea."
3. Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

4. Naremore, 22.
5. Dean MacCannell, "Democracy's Turn: On Homeless *Noir*," *Shades of Noir*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Verso, 1993), 282.
6. MacCannell argues that the "still unexamined tension at the heart of *film noir* is that between senile capitalism and democracy," and that noir "witnesses" the confrontation between the two "with implacable numbness" (284). In *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), Sean McCann locates a similar dynamic in the tradition of American detective fiction, in which he sees the drama of the New Deal's confrontation between capitalism and government playing itself out.
7. Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir 1941–1953* (1955; San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2002), 12.
8. The line is quoted in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 18.
9. The film noir cycle is generally described as running from 1941 to 1958. "Neo-noir" usually refers to all films made after that period that look back in some way to the earlier films. As my analysis here suggests, there is a useful distinction to be made between the 1970s neo-noirs and those that emerge starting in the 1980s.
10. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Random House, 2003), 8.
11. Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 8–9.
12. Ibid., 9.
13. Kim Humphery, *Shelf Life: Supermarkets and the Changing Cultures of Consumption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6, 71–72.
14. Bowlby, 153.
15. Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 24.
16. In *Black & White & Noir: America's Pulp Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), Paula Rabinowitz offers an everything-and-the-kitchen-sink reading of commodity fetishism and the role of objects in noir, among other things. Her discussion touches on the way that Phyllis Dietrichson's identity as femme fatale is an accretion of signifying objects: "Barbara Stanwyck's anklet and heels, her cigarette and whiskey, her cat glasses and gun would indeed turn you into a femme fatale—murderous, deadly, and doomed to die in a hail of bullets" (191).
17. Naremore, 89.
18. Thomas Schatz, in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Film Making, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), makes a comparison between the Western hero and the detective: "Like the Westerner, the hardboiled detective is not only a man apart, but he is a social mediator: his capacity for violence and streetwise savvy ally him with the outlaw element, although his values and attitude commit him to the promise of a well-ordered community" (128).
19. Humphery, 65.
20. Jennifer Cross, *The Supermarket Trap: The Consumer and the Food Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), viii.
21. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 38.
22. The setup of *Fight Club* is quite similar to the argument made by Susan Faludi in her book *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: HarperCollins-Perennial, 1999), released in the same year as *Fight Club*. *Stiffed* argues that contemporary men feel that traditional masculine roles and behaviors are no longer available to them in a consumer society and thus feel lost, confused, and angry. Many commentators have noted this convergence, and I find it cheering to think of *Fight Club* as offering an introduction to the work of Susan Faludi for adolescent boys.
23. Lucy Chen, "Fight Club," *Masculinity and the American Dream in Films* (2000), http://www.columbia.edu/~lcc20/amhs/fightclub.html (accessed 20 February 2004).

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ABSTRACT This article traces film noir's conflicted place in postwar American consumer culture. Using detailed analyses of supermarket scenes in *Double Indemnity*, *The Long Goodbye*, and *Fight Club*, it argues that the films stage a struggle between two competing versions of the American national character: the consumer society versus the noir underworld.

KEYWORDS noir, consumerism, Wilder, Altman, Fincher

■ DANIEL HERBERT

SKY'S THE LIMIT

Transnationality and Identity in *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky*

BEGIN WITH A NIGHTMARE. The opening sequence of the 1997 Spanish film *Abre los Ojos* presents a powerful allegory of alienation within the contemporary city. The film's protagonist, César (Eduardo Noriega), wakes up to the phrase "Abre los ojos" playing on his alarm clock, examines his handsome face in a mirror, gets dressed, and exits his well-appointed apartment. He drives through the streets of Madrid and notices that the city is devoid of all other inhabitants. He leaves his car and, in an operatically grand crane shot, runs through the vacant city. When he wakes again, distressed and breathing quickly, the sequence is revealed as a nightmare. But what sort of nightmare? His terror is that of someone cut off from the culture that produced the material conditions in which he roams. The film explores the individual as a *psychic* subject in relation to the material world. As the film jarringly repeats his action of waking up, it affirms how repetition, variation, conscious, unconscious, and culture work together to inform subjectivity and constitute identity. In this way, *Abre los Ojos* declares from the start that it will investigate the ideological aspects of identity, construed as a nightmare that must be rationalized.

Now, make this a recurrent nightmare. In 2001, *Abre los Ojos* was faithfully remade by Hollywood as *Vanilla Sky*.[1] The opening sequence of that film largely

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Abre los Ojos (Alejandro Almenábar, 1997): alone in a depopulated Madrid

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replicates the opening of *Abre los Ojos*, but relocated to New York City. David Aames (Tom Cruise) steps out of his Ferrari and runs through an empty Times Square. This city is a distinctly commercial space: the film rapidly cuts between images of advertising billboards and video screens with images of the agonized protagonist in a techno-music-driven, MTV-style montage. *Vanilla Sky* foregrounds consumer culture as mediating the relation between the individual and the social world, thereby altering significantly the allegory of alienation carried over from *Abre los Ojos*.

Both films associate material culture with personal identity. But there are differences in their presentation. So what is at stake in the transnational movement of texts, meanings, and ideological "limits" in the remake process?[2] Both films explore the problem of identity (physical, psychological, national, and gendered). But the very migration from one national context to another undercuts any singular notion of identity. In fact, the economic and intertextual relationships between *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* reveal a transnational negotiation of Spanish cinema and national identity, as well as Hollywood and American national identity, in the contemporary context of increasing globalization. Together they demonstrate the difficulty of conceiving Spanish identity outside of transnational capitalism and point to the unstable yet powerful forces of American national identity within the global culture industry.

In exploring the relations between these two films, I am drawing upon and modifying recent scholarship on film remakes and cinematic intertextuality. Some of this work deals with how remakes are evidence of the historically and culturally specific contexts in which they were produced and distributed.[3] Other examples investigate transnational remakes, most regularly Hollywood remakes of French films, to explore issues of transnational cultural exchange.[4] To this extent, the transnational relations of *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* reflect the ongoing problematization of "national cinema," a concept founded on cinema's relation to the "imagined community" of the nation.[5] As Andrew Higson states: "the contingent communities that cinema imagines are much more likely to be either local or transnational than national."[6] The transnational Hollywood remake offers a privileged site for investigating the contemporary contexts of different cinemas, specifically in relation to the forces of globalization.

This model provides an alternative to much of the discussion of transnational Hollywood remakes within popular criticism, which often relies on a simplistic binary between national and transnational forces. Many critics who compared *Vanilla Sky* to *Abre los Ojos* lamented the recent proliferation of Hollywood remakes of "foreign" films and relied upon discourses of quality, artistry, originality, and cultural specificity.[7] For instance, the title of Kenneth Turan's review in the *Los Angeles Times* read: "From Paella to Pot Roast: '*Vanilla Sky*,' the remake by Cameron Crowe of a 1997 Spanish Film, is Smooth and Professional, But Something is Off in His Translation's Recipe."[8] Like many similar reviews, Turan's essay assumes a hierarchy of critical taste that tends to nationalize and thereby simplify the transnational relations of these texts by conflating artistic evaluations with fixed cultural identities. In fact, the transnational relations between these two films are more mobile and complex.

Although the context for the two films is transnational, their interrelation coincides with changes in *national* economic, political, and cinematic conditions. As Santos Juliá has pointed out, the political background to *Abre los Ojos* can be largely defined in terms of the stabilization of democracy and democratic values.[9] During this period, Spain "opened its market to the international world and had become fully integrated, culturally and politically, into the European Union,"[10] initiating a new macro-regional economic and cultural existence for the nation.[11] The modernization of infrastructure, urbanization, and liberalization of capital markets worked in unison with Spain's increasing international significance, as seen in the 1992 World Expo in Sevilla and the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona. By promoting Barcelona as the new cultural capital of Europe, Spain's national identity was repositioned within a transnational frame. Spanish cinema played a significant role in configuring the international perception of the nation, as indicated most conspicuously by the popularity of the films of Pedro Almodóvar. However, Spain witnessed the emergence of a new wave of young, "post-Almodóvar" directors during the 1990s, among whom *Abre los Ojos* director Alejandro Amenábar was an important figure.[12] His presence on the international film scene has continued to increase and, in 2004, his film *Mar Adentro* (*The Sea Inside*) won the Academy Award for best foreign-language film. Prompted in part by changes in Spanish state funding for film production, which replaced a system of advance subsidies with "subsidies geared to the commercial results of films,"[13] these directors have tended to make genre films geared toward popular and commercial appeal.[14] In these respects, the political and economic contexts in contemporary Spain reflect the nation's increasing conformity with the global trends.

The forces of globalization have also affected the economic situation for the United States and cinematic

context for Hollywood, although very differently than in Spain. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the United States held a privileged position in the world economy and nearly unchecked political hegemony as a result of the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. Facilitated by new international bodies such as the World Trade Organization, select U.S. corporations achieved multinational expansion during this period. As the cultural embodiment of the U.S. role in the transnational management of capital and division of labor, Hollywood benefited from and responded to globalization in distinct ways. Specifically, Hollywood expanded horizontally to secure international markets and gained unprecedented amounts of international financing, most notably in the form of international corporate mergers, in order to maintain its managerial dominance in the global culture industry.[15] This has led some scholars to view Hollywood as a *fundamentally global* phenomenon and particularly note that its "hegemony is built upon and sustained by the . . . exploitation of a global division of labor."[16] This argument undermines claims by Hollywood marketers and apologists that its films maintain global appeal through universal narratives and the expression of American populist values.[17] The transformation of *Abre los Ojos* into *Vanilla Sky* demonstrates that Hollywood's transnational dominance relies on strategic exercises in power and not necessarily narrative transparency. In these respects, the United States and Hollywood developed new forms of transnational interconnectedness under globalization—specifically, a strategically secured and maintained dominance over the means of cultural production.

Through the examination of the economic contexts in which *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* were produced and circulated, we can begin to perceive their modes of cultural interpenetration. *Abre los Ojos* was produced by Sogetel (later renamed Sogecine), the film co-financing and production division of the media conglomerate Sogecable and the biggest film production company in Spain at the time.[18] Sogetel was instrumental in promoting the careers of the "post-Almodóvar" directors, focusing during the mid-1990s on the production of thrillers and horror films.[19] In addition, Sogecable consistently secured deals with production and distribution companies in the United States and Europe. This was the case for *Abre los Ojos*, which was co-produced with the Italian company Lucky Red and the French company Les Films Alain Sarde, as well as the Spanish outfit Producciones del Escorpion. In fact, *Abre los Ojos* was the first in a concerted effort on the part of Sogetel to engage in a number of multilateral co-productions.[20] In this respect, *Abre los Ojos* conforms to a significant trend of pan-European media co-productions, whose economic pairings work to make European films viable despite Hollywood's hegemony in the region. This type of maneuvering was quite effective in the Spanish market during the late 1990s. The Hollywood market share dropped by 11%, Spanish films gained a 14% share, and other European films held a 19% share.[21] *Abre los Ojos* played a key role in Spain's economic recuperation of its domestic market, where the film earned over $7.5 million,[22] becoming the second-biggest domestic box-office hit at the time.

In this way, pan-European co-productions facilitated Spain's ability to support a commercially viable "indigenous" film industry. However, these same economic pairings are evidence of the transnational flow of capital in the cultural sector, which highlights the paradoxes inherent in speaking of a contemporary "indigenous" Spanish industry, especially in relation to *Abre los Ojos*. As a result of its multinational economic base, the film draws attention to the transnational forces that sustain "national cinema." Spain has needed to create international partnerships in order to secure its domestic market against Hollywood domination. If viewed as representative of contemporary Spanish national cinema, *Abre los Ojos* indicates the strong connection between Spanish cinema and a pan-European cinema, which in turn struggles for transnational hegemony with Global Hollywood.

This pan-European funding of *Abre los Ojos* is further complicated by its international distribution and eventual purchase by the production company Cruise-Wagner. In addition to winning economic success within Spain, the film played and won awards at numerous international film festivals, including Berlin and Tokyo.[23] While playing at Sundance, the film was purchased by Summit Entertainment for international release and Artisan Entertainment for release within the United States. Most importantly, perhaps, is the purchase by Summit of the English-language remake rights for $600,000.[24] Cruise-Wagner purchased these remake rights several months later, while Artisan planned a limited theatrical run for the film and Summit sold off its international distribution rights territory by territory.[25] Here, one can see how the institutional framework of film festivals enables the international dissemination of "national" cultural products through the distribution deals attained there. Additionally, these institutions provide the venues by which film texts may be bought and sold for cultural re-inscription in the form of their remake rights. The trade in remake rights functions in a parallel fashion to territorial dis-

tribution rights and may be seen as another mode of transnational cultural migration.

Yet this form of migration has distinctly different motivations and consequences than territorial distribution. As the writers of *Global Hollywood* argue, much of Hollywood's power derives from the legislation and enforcement of international copyright laws, at times even benefiting from nationally specific imbalances among these laws.[26] As a conceptual, legal, and economic expression of authorship and ownership, copyright regulates how, by whom, when, and where a text may be copied. Remake rights make this act of copying literal; they regulate and sanction the production of derivative film texts in different contexts by different authors (read: corporate owners). In this way, the remake results from a legal and economic transaction whereby the copyright of a film changes hands for the purpose of that film's revised re-production.[27] Further, the sale of *Abre los Ojos* demonstrates how Hollywood uses the international trade in remake rights to stabilize its own global hegemony. Because production and distribution companies in many other nations cannot match the consolidated power of Hollywood, they rely upon Hollywood for global distribution. This system enables Hollywood not only to distribute and profit from foreign rivals, but also to strengthen its production capabilities and control over worldwide marketing by *remaking* those films that prove successful in world markets. In this way, the transnational Hollywood remake is a structure of dominance, one which takes advantage of the economic competition posed by select films and foreign production companies.

Thus, the economic and legal transformation of *Abre los Ojos* into *Vanilla Sky* is not a simple matter of a Spanish film becoming an American film. Cruise-Wagner has a "first-look deal" with Paramount Pictures and is housed on the Paramount lot in Los Angeles.[28] This mutually beneficial relationship allows Cruise-Wagner to develop projects independently from Paramount on the condition that the studio gets first choice at developing, buying, and/or distributing these pictures. This allows the studio to reduce the financial risks of development and enables Cruise-Wagner to operate with the regular financial backing of the studio. In fact, Paramount provided the money to purchase the rights to *Abre los Ojos* for Cruise-Wagner.[29] In addition, Paramount is part of the Viacom corporation, a transnational media conglomerate with operations in radio, television, publishing, film production, and film distribution. Cruise-Wagner thus holds an important position within the content-development area of the transnational culture industry, as it is backed by Paramount and available for synergistic opportunities with the rest of the Viacom infrastructure. So, when *Vanilla Sky* began shooting in New York City in late 2000, in English and with a production budget of approximately $75 million,[30] it was not a simple matter of a geographic or lingual transposition of *Abre los Ojos*. Instead, the text migrated from one transnational arena to another, from the Spanish/pan-European macro-region to the transnationally operational and dominant Hollywood.

The transnational relations between these two films also find expression textually and intertextually. As noted, both films pose questions of identity from the start. Both films also explore masculine identity in contemporary, transnational worlds. Following its opening, *Abre los Ojos* continues to examine, disrupt, and eventually reconfigure the identity of its protagonist, specifically through his body, subjectivity, and relation to transnational corporations. Early in the film, César rejects his casual lover Nuria (Najwa Nimri) when he takes up with Sofia, played by Penélope Cruz. In revenge, Nuria takes César into her car, drives rapidly through the streets of Madrid, and intentionally crashes the car off the road. César's face is destroyed and the film displays this in numerous, harshly lit close-ups.

The graphic detailing of hideous make-up effects and César's terrified reactions to his monstrous appearance place the film within the horror genre. The protagonist is a monster seeking to repair or escape his disfigured body. In this respect, the film alludes to the horror classic *Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and the ingenious make-up of actor Lon Cheney. This reference is made explicitly in *Abre los Ojos* when César describes his disfigurement to Sofia and mentions the film by name. Later, doctors present him with a featureless facial prosthetic to cover his ruined face. Yet, even after César wears this uncanny mask, the horror of the body is merely displaced. Instead of covering the horror of his bodily damage, this mask emphasizes César's inability to secure his idealized physical form. His face loses meaning as a social signifier, as the mask is declaratively anonymous. Further, this mask once again situates *Abre los Ojos* within a field of transnational horror films, recalling the mask in George Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1959). Any sense of physical identity in *Abre los Ojos* is offset visually and intertextually by horror-film tropes of mutilation and disfigurement.

The inescapable horror of César's deformed body is connected to a wider problem of subjective mutability. The film renders the terrors of his subjectivity most clearly through ambiguous ellipses in chronology and elisions between conscious and dreaming experiences. Early in the narrative, the film intercuts between the

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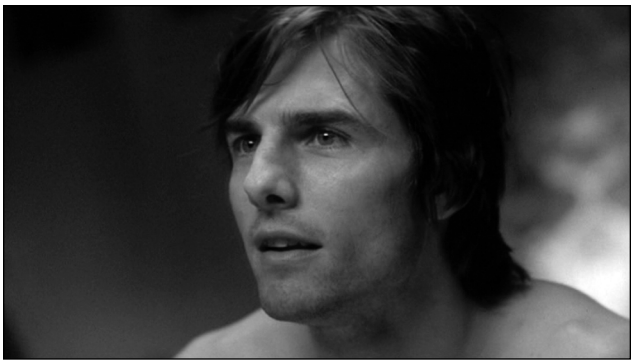

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Abre los Ojos and *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001): César and David affirm their beauty

main action and scenes of César in a prison cell narrating his story to a therapist. Although these prison scenes clearly take place at some point in César's future, the timeframe is not precisely given. The therapist refers to events that César does not remember and that the film has not shown. As he struggles to remember his past for the dubious therapist, César works to assemble his psychic identity in a unified fashion. Yet the film's leaps in time and space dramatize the difficulty of this process and in fact reveal the horror of a psyche cut off from linear time.

Many of the film's jarring leaps in time, space, and reality status revolve around César's desire to regain his unmarred face. In a dream sequence directly after the car crash, an unmarred César walks through a park with Sofia, only to suddenly wake up in his apartment to find his face disfigured. Later, once it seems César's face has been repaired and he can live happily with Sofia, he wakes in the middle of the night to find that the disfigurement has returned. This is reversed again; he wakes from the nightmare to find his face intact. These slippages between psychic states successfully blur the reality status of the images, as even the condition of his face cannot serve as a clear marker of authentic experience: thus, *Abre los Ojos* subordinates physicality to the psychological determinations of identity. Yet, given the fluid movement between false and true memories as well as between dreaming and waking states, the mind proves to be as horrifically unstable as the body.

Having undermined the construction of identity as a physical or psychic condition, *Abre los Ojos* suggests that transnational corporations are the final determinants of the protagonist's identity. Several times in the film César watches television commercials and programs detailing a cryogenics company. A French man named Duvernois (Gérard Barray) owns the company and discusses the process of cryonization, whereby people's bodies are frozen and held for later resurrection. Walt Disney comes up as an example of the process in every one of these discussions. These references to Disney situate the company in the realm of Global Hollywood and would have likely held implications of American cultural imperialism given European debates around Euro Disney in the 1990s. Further, by presenting this narrative development graphically through television, the film draws a strong comparison between cryogenics and screen media. In this way, the cryogenics company is indirectly aligned with the transnational culture industry.

As César proceeds in his search for the basis of his identity, he moves ever closer to dealing directly with Duvernois and the cryogenics company. Finally César confronts Duvernois at the Spanish offices of the company, housed in the Picasso Tower in Madrid. The last section of the film expends tremendous effort to rationalize all the narrative ambiguities that had come before. César discovers that he is currently being held in a cryogenic chamber in Arizona, owned by the multinational company Life Extension. Standing atop the tower, Duvernois explains that all César has experienced is a virtual simulation implanted into his dreaming psyche by the company. This answer to the mysteries of identity aligns César's experience and the film itself with ideological determination by transnational corporations. Through overtly rational discourse, the film attempts to explain the otherwise invisible forces which construct the world, his identity, and their interrelation. So the explanation projects a certain imagination of a transnational identity. Explicitly, César's body, mind, and experience have all been conditioned by transnational forces that re-present or simulate the Spanish capital Madrid, as seen in the beginning sequence or from the tower at the conclusion.

In *Abre los Ojos*, transnational forces reproduce with frightening exactitude the conditions of locality and the relation between the two may only be understood through rationalization. Those places where the individual breaks from the wholeness of this picture,

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Abre los Ojos and *Vanilla Sky*: psychic trauma and physical disfigurement

where fissures occur between experience and reality, are sites of horror and trauma. *Abre los Ojos* thus situates transnational corporate economics as the active agent in the construction of identity as it is experienced in the body and the mind; the individual's only hope is to discover this underlying structure (even if it cannot be countered).

By reproducing this narrative, *Vanilla Sky* also imagines a transnational identity for its protagonist. Yet this transnational existence differs considerably from that imagined in *Abre los Ojos*. As in the earlier film, *Vanilla Sky* uses make-up effects and narrative ellipses to destabilize the physical and psychological components of identity. However, its protagonist has a dramatically different relationship to the transnational culture industry. The character David Aames owns and operates a multinational publishing company that specializes in beauty magazines. In this respect, the character is actually *part* of the transnational culture industry, as opposed to being solely its dupe as in *Abre los Ojos*. One of the primary struggles within the film is Aames's attempt to retain control over his company as the other members of its board of directors try to wrest it away. Not coincidentally, these men are humorously referred to as the "Seven Dwarfs," maintaining the allusion to the Disney Corporation and cultural imperialism from *Abre los Ojos*. Yet, here the protagonist struggles within the internal makeup of this transnationally operative ideological force.

Although *Vanilla Sky* similarly seeks to rationalize its questioning of identity through drawn-out exposition at its conclusion, this explanation reveals important contradictions. Throughout its narrative, the film makes numerous references to popular culture,[31] from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) playing on the television in the prison cell, to posters of *Jules and Jim* (also 1962) in Aames's apartment, to the innumerable pop songs which pervade the soundtrack. These references indicate *Vanilla Sky*'s dramatically different position within the global culture industry, as seen in the large number of paid licenses for its references in the credits. Moreover, the film at once aligns Aames's cryonic experience in the film with popular culture as well as separates the two. On the one hand, when Aames jumps from the top of the building and his life flashes before his eyes, the film presents a montage of images from other texts to show how he modeled his entire existence on pop culture. On the other hand, by placing him among the cultural producers within the diegesis, the film provides the protagonist with a semblance of agency in his own ideological construction.

This characterization speaks directly to a different mode of transnational identity from that of *Abre los Ojos*. Whereas the "Spanish" film slowly reveals that the transnational culture industry wholly determines the experience of its protagonist, *Vanilla Sky* maintains the privileged role of the protagonist within his own self-construction, no matter how inauthentic that may be. This ideological asymmetry between the films articulates differing relations of power under globalization and commercial culture. Although neither film imagines an outside to the virtual existence under transnational corporate control, their different characterizations of the means of production speak to American managerial dominance within this structure.

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Vanilla Sky: faceless, David tries to reconstruct the past

In addition to this reconfiguration of masculine identity under globalization, the films' constructions of feminine identities reveal another mode of limited transnational mobility. Both *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* initially create a polarity between a "bad girl," Nuria and Julia respectively, and a "good girl," Sofia in both instances. This feminine duality propels the protagonists' desire and movement through the plot. In both films, the bad girl is noted for her sexual appetite, which is reciprocated by the male protagonist yet appears to disqualify her from any emotional investment on his part. The good girl, on the other hand, elicits genuine emotions from the protagonist, who then reduces his sexual assertiveness to indicate the seriousness of his feelings. As these narratives play out, the bad girls destroy themselves after having been sexually used by the protagonists and the good girl comes to the rescue by helping the protagonist through his physical recuperation. This appears to replicate longstanding binaries between virgin and whore as the possibilities for feminine identity. That these positions are reproduced in the two films indicates a greater, transnational, and patriarchal construction of gendered identities. Specifically, these extremely limited possibilities for feminine identity appear neatly transferable across vast transnational spheres, indicating how the films' imaginations of transnational identities remain constrained by masculinist discourse.

As the psychology of the protagonist comes unglued, the opposition between virgin and whore likewise collapses. In *Abre los Ojos*, Nuria begins appearing where Sofia had existed; the body of actress Najwa Nimri displaces that of Penélope Cruz in various series of intercut shots. Similar displacements occur between Cameron Diaz and Penélope Cruz in *Vanilla Sky*. These fluctuations between female bodies work alongside the changes in the protagonist's face to establish the instability of his subjectivity. The protagonist seems unable to sustain the binary of possibilities of femininity and in this way the strict duality of feminine identities proves to be the undoing of the male protagonist. Eventually, the bodies of the bad girls Nuria/Julia entirely replace those of Sofia/Sofia and the confusion this causes leads him to murder the woman. Among the issues this raises is the structural and psychodynamic similarity between *Abre los Ojos* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), which similarly uses feminine duality to reveal fractures in male subjectivity. Many English-language critical responses to *Abre los Ojos* compared it to *Vertigo*, illuminating yet another instance of transnational intertextuality and patriarchal discourse within the film.[32] Just as importantly, the fluctuation of female bodies in *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* creates a vision of femininity as fundamentally unstable. This fluctuation could also be read as consolidating the already limited possibilities for femininity into a single female body. In either case, the malleability of feminine identity is constrained by limits which neither film transcends, however much they indicate the insubstantiality of these limits.

Even so, the transnational frame of these films intersects with their construction of gender in interesting ways. It is notable that Penélope Cruz plays the Sofia role in both *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky*. Her repeated presence connects the films in a transnational dialogue and indicates their individual positions toward gender construction. Her role in *Abre los Ojos* occurred after she had already appeared in several Spanish films that received international recognition, including *Belle Epoque* (1992) and *Live Flesh* (1997). In this respect, her position in *Abre los Ojos* as the "good object" signals her importance as a representative of Spanish femininity. By the time she reprised her role in *Vanilla Sky*, Cruz had acted in a number of English-language films, where she variously played Mexican (*Hi-Lo Country* [1998]), Brazilian (*Woman on Top* [2000]), and Greek characters (*Captain Corelli's Mandolin* [2001]). As her nationality in *Vanilla Sky* is never addressed, the film draws upon her Americanized role as a pan-Hispanic, pan-Mediterranean romantic female lead. In this respect, the unfixing of feminine identity within the diegesis of *Vanilla Sky* mirrors an unfixing of national identity within the American context. The relationship between both films reveals how the fluctuation and repetition of physical bodies, specifically female in this context, conflates and exposes transnational ideological framings of gender and nationality.

This trajectory of displaced female bodies and nationalities accrues even greater meaning in the star discourse around the films, as seen in numerous gossip and entertainment magazines. Specifically, these magazines lay out a narrative of transnational travel that they subsequently corral into a melodramatic, sexist discourse of marital fracture. During production of *Vanilla Sky* in February 2001, star Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman split up and this was widely reported as a surprising development for what was reported to be a stable marriage.[33] Three days later, Cruise filed for a divorce, an action that was interpreted as being coldly rapid.[34] The majority of articles following the divorce depicted Kidman as the jilted lover and sympathetic victim, a sentiment augmented by a reported miscarriage.[35]

In July and August 2001, a real-life romance between Cruise and Penélope Cruz began getting major

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Abre los Ojos: Sofia as object of desire

press, coverage which worked in tandem with the publicity for the film's upcoming release. Penélope Cruz surely stood to significantly enhance her position within the Hollywood star system as a result of this association, just as Nicole Kidman's own earlier rise to stardom and renegotiation of Australian national identity had been facilitated by her romantic and cinematic attachment to Tom Cruise, beginning with *Days of Thunder* in 1990.[36] However, the reports about Cruise and Cruz insinuated that the open displays of affection between the new couple seemed out of place, and set up the cynical view that the romance was a publicity stunt.[37] Such insinuations were in tune with ongoing reports about Cruise's lawsuits against people claiming he was gay.[38] Other articles reported that the romance between Cruz and Cruise had begun during the production of *Vanilla Sky* (while Cruise and Kidman were still married) and so depicted Cruz as a home wrecker.[39] This followed reports that she had similarly disrupted romances between Matt Damon and Winona Ryder as well as between Nicolas Cage and Patricia Arquette.[40] In other words, a reactionary, sexist, and derogatory discourse attended the transnational migration of actress Penélope Cruz—and one which contrasted strongly with her role as the "good girl" in *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky*.

The tension between these positions was at its most severe at the August 2001 premiere of *The Others*, a film that starred Nicole Kidman, was executive produced by Tom Cruise, and directed by Alejandro Amenábar.[41] Numerous articles and reviews of *The Others* and *Vanilla Sky* discussed the divorce, the new romance, and the female rivalry and so conditioned the readings of these films.[42] Cruise and Kidman's divorce was finalized on the same day as the Los Angeles premiere of *The Others*, further blurring the lines between the film and real-life events.[43] Here, the production of *The Others* and the reviews of these films reveal an important transnational exchange of cultural workers. Indeed, whereas Penélope Cruz moved into the Hollywood system with *Vanilla Sky*, Nicole Kidman moved into the Spanish/European cultural system with *The Others*. On the one hand, this reveals the mobility of these figures across cultural spaces. Yet just as importantly, this transnational movement was constrained by a narrative of broken romances, jilted wives, and a highly sexualized Spanish temptress.

This exchange of female bodies openly converses with the narratives of *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky*. While in the films female bodies are continually displaced as a symptom of the male protagonist's unstable psychology, the physical exchange in the surrounding discourse also highlights the privileged role of male cultural producers.[44] In both cases, that is within the arch-narrative of all these films and the gossip around them, there existed a conflation of gender relations and national identities within the context of the transnational culture industries. Viewed in this way, the possibilities for transnational identity seen in *Abre los Ojos, Vanilla Sky*, and the discourses around them appear asymmetrical and very limited indeed.

The concluding images of *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* confront the problems of transnationalism by visually transcending their local settings. As César stands atop the Picasso tower, Madrid looms behind him under a brilliantly blue and cloud-speckled sky. As he is told of his transnational existence, he stands centrally amid this locality. Given the difficulty of representing the transnational as a space of vast interconnectivity, *Abre los Ojos* depicts the local at its most expansive. The city backdrop falls away as the scene continues and César is framed in low-angle shots against the sky. Abstracted from his surroundings, he floats within a virtual space among the clouds. *Vanilla Sky* concludes similarly and thus evokes its title. David Aames stands high above New York, tinted rose and orange from the computer-generated sunset. The transnational context once again displaces the individual from his immediate surroundings yet finds representation only through such localized, embodied experience.

When the characters leap from the buildings, they reject the apparent duality of this situation. Graphically, these refusals take the duplicitous form of bodies liberated in space and yet violently bound for the pavement. In both cases, the untenable dichotomy between the local and the global, between immanent experience and transcendent interconnection, compels a drastic reconsideration of how these spheres interpenetrate. At the center is the individual, whose identity is virtual, pliant, yet determined by the world he inhabits. Identity is literally suspended, caught in the middle of a shifting matrix of limited possibilities.

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Vanilla Sky: the precarious virtuality of David's identity

As allegories of transnational identity, these films reveal the difficulty of reconciling the individual with the global. In both, identity fluctuates between beauty and disfigurement, between two entirely different female bodies, as well as between dream and "reality." Through the metaphors of cryogenic technology and virtual reality, the films depict transnationalism as a comprehensive structure that sets these bounds and attempts to unify these multiple and conflicting conditions. On the one hand, this renders the opening nightmares of alienation as real as any other moment in the films, as the characters genuinely *are* disconnected from their physical and social realities throughout. On the other hand, the characters are simultaneously interconnected with a transnational corporation that thoroughly "re-makes" these realities. In this respect, transnationalism disembodies and dislocates the individual, abstracting both identity and reality, yet simultaneously casts these abstractions in embodied and localized forms.

A consideration of the economic, intertextual, and extra-discursive relationships between *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* leads to issues pertaining to the limited mobility of transnational identities. On the one hand, *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky* indicate that Spanish cinema and identity, as well as Hollywood and U.S. nationalism, cannot easily be understood outside transnational corporate culture. On the other hand, these examples reveal the contestation between multiple axes of power that reconfigures identity alongside economic determinations. Most importantly, perhaps, the relations between and around these films indicate how transnationalism itself is characterized by a struggle for hegemony within multiple cultural discourses.

However, these forces are not merely discursive; they have real effects on bodies, minds, and the ideological parameters of identity. This can be seen most clearly at the end of *Vanilla Sky*, which features one of the last-recorded Hollywood images of the World Trade Center twin towers. As the film had been shot in early 2001, yet was released two months after September 11, *Vanilla Sky* entered a wider debate within the United States regarding the virtual representation of the World Trade after its genuine destruction.[45] Few things indicated better the United States' dominant role in the world economy before September 11 than the World Trade Center, a symbolic and practical function not lost on the individuals who crashed airplanes into the towers. The sudden change of physical, cultural, and ideological landscape rendered in their destruction had various effects on contemporaneous films which featured the towers; a trailer for *Spider-Man* (2002) was not released, *Zoolander* (2001) erased the towers altogether, while *Sidewalks of New York* (2001) and *Vanilla Sky* kept the towers visible.[46] Discussions of *Vanilla Sky*'s representation of the twin towers were thus imbricated with larger discussions of the U.S. role within global politics, economics, and military operations. As these debates quickly moved to reify a newly exceptional

and vehemently nationalist identity for the U.S., *Vanilla Sky* can be seen to have been strongly re-nationalized by reactions to September 11. Similarly to the way the World Trade Center moved from symbolizing the United States' transnational dominance to being a strictly national icon, so too were *Vanilla Sky*'s transnational relations effaced by messages spoken in violence. This should indicate how constantly shifting political, economic, cultural, and ideological factors negotiate the conditions of nationalism and transnationalism, and the stakes at risk in these fluctuations. Further, the genuine effects of transnational hegemony and national exclusivity illuminated on September 11 should caution cultural critics to mobilize these notions with great care. End with a nightmare.

NOTES

1. Paul Julian Smith provides a persuasive and engaging comparative analysis of these two films in "High Anxiety: *Abre los ojos*/*Vanilla Sky*," *Journal of Romance Studies* 4, no. 1 (spring 2004): 91–102. There, he discusses the themes of "urban alienation and the danger of the image" in the films and contrasts the stylistic excess of *Vanilla Sky* with the coherence of *Abre los Ojos*. Although Smith also demonstrates how these two films disturb certain cultural binaries, he does not address the issues of transnational spaces and identities.
2. Rather than a static or reflectionist model of "ideology," I mean by this term the application of pressure and the setting of limits within a social field comprised of heterogeneous forces. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 84, 87, 110, 112–13.
3. This is the objective of several essays in *Play it Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, ed. Andrew Hall and Stuart Y. McDougal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) as well as in *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*, ed. Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
4. Lucy Mazdon, *Encore Hollywood: Remaking French Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000); Carolyn A. Durham, *Double Takes: Culture and Gender in French Films and Their American Remakes* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998).
5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 1991), 5–7.
6. Andrew Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 73.
7. Marshall Fine, "Open to Interpretation: Hollywood Versions of Foreign Films Rarely Live Up to the Originals. Cameron Crowe's '*Vanilla Sky*' is the Latest to Try to Make the Cultural Leap," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 2001; Emmanuel Levy, "Spanish Gold Tarnished by Hollywood Handling," *Screen International*, 14 December 2001–3 January 2002.
8. 14 December 2001.
9. Santos Juliá, "History, Politics, and Culture, 1975–1996," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*, ed. David T. Gies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 119.
10. Juliá, 119.
11. Marsha Kinder argues that regions function ideologically like nations, yet represent geographically larger (macro-region) or smaller (micro-region) collectivities. Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 389.
12. Núria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2003), 144.
13. Peter Besas, "Financial Structure of Spanish Cinema," in *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/Media/Representation*, ed. Marsha Kinder (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 257.
14. Triana-Toribio, 143–63.
15. Tino Balio, "'A Major Presence in All of the World's Important Markets': The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s," in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), 58, 61.
16. Toby Miller, et. al., *Global Hollywood* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 51.
17. Ibid., 51.
18. "Sogetel Plans to Push Newcomers," *Variety.com*, 8 January 1998, http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117434564?categoryid=13&cs=1 (accessed 17 October 2004).
19. Ibid.
20. David Puente, "Sogetel Expands Co-prod Line-up," *Screen International*, 28 February 1997.
21. Adam Dawtrey, et. al., "Old World Charms B.O.," *Variety.com*, 24 December 1997, http://www.variety.com/vstory/VR1117343321?categoryid=38&cs=1 (accessed 17 October 2004).
22. "Box Office Film Search Results: Open Your Eyes," *Variety.com*, http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=filmsearch_exact&dept=Film&movieID=10229 (accessed 17 October 2004).
23. Jon Herskovitz, "Amenabar's 'Eyes' Wins Top Prize at Tokyo," *Variety.com*, 9 November 1998. http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117488258?categoryid=13&cs=1 (accessed 17 October 2004).
24. "News in Brief," *Screen International*, 30 January 1998.
25. Dana Harris, "Cruise Reopens Spanish 'Eyes'," *Hollywood Reporter*, 6 April 1998.
26. Miller, et. al., 111, 129.
27. Thomas Leitch notes that remakes require a transfer of property rights. However, he posits that remakes involve the adaptation of non-cinematic sources at some point in their intertextual chain. The case of *Abre los Ojos* and *Vanilla Sky*, among others, shows how the ownership of "original" films must also be transferred in order to produce remakes. Thomas M. Leitch, "Twice-Told Tales: Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the Remake," in *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*, ed. Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 38–39.
28. Nick Roe, Production Executive at Cruise-Wagner, email to author, 25 September 2004.
29. Ibid.
30. "Project: *Vanilla Sky*," *Variety.com*, 14 December 2001, http://www.variety.com/studiosystems/index.asp?layout=studiosystems&ss_view=s_s_project&mode=allcredits&project_id=130700 (accessed 25 October 2004).
31. Director Cameron Crowe claimed to have put over 468 pop culture references into *Vanilla Sky*. Quoted in Barbara Ellen, "Blood on the Tracks," *The Times* (London), 24 January 2002.

32. See for example, Paul Julian Smith, "*Abre los Ojos*," *Sight and Sound* 10, no. 3 (March 2000): 50; Chris Perriam, "Alejandro Amenábar's *Abre los Ojos*," in *Spanish Popular Cinema*, ed. Antonio Lázro-Reboll and Andrew Willis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 217–18.
33. "Cruise and Kidman Splitsville," *National Enquirer*, 5 February 2001, http://www.nationalenquirer.com/stories/feature.cfm?instanceid=9465 (accessed 25 October 2004); Josh Wolk, Ty Burr, "Days of Asunder," *Entertainment Weekly*, 16 February 2001, 14.
34. Russel Scott Smith, "Divorce Hollywood Style," *Us Weekly*, 27 August 2001, 34; Anne-Marie O'Neill, et. al., "Cruising for Control," *People Weekly* 26 February 2001, 74.
35. Ann Oldenburg, "Miscarriage Confirmed Kidman Was Nearly Three Months Along," *USA Today*, 2 April 2001.
36. Kenneth Turan, "When a Spouse Intrudes: Nicole Kidman Pursues Celebrity, at All Costs, in *To Die For*," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 September 1995.
37. Sean Daly, "A Very Public Affair," *Us Weekly*, 6 August 2001, 36.
38. Josh Tyrangiel, "Messing with Tom is Risky Business," *Time*, 14 May 2001, 81; Liza Hamm, et. al., "Cruise Controls Rumors Again," *People Weekly*, 18 June 2001, 17.
39. "Curse of Homewrecker Cruz," *New York Post*, 18 March 2002; Daly, 36.
40. Daly, 36.
41. According to Nick Roe, there was no comprehensive deal with Amenábar, Cruise-Wagner, and Nicole Kidman. Email to author, 25 September 2004.
42. Nancy Ayala, "Amenabar Steps Out of the Shadows," *USA Today*, 10 August 2001; Jen Jensen, "The Mind of an Unmarried Man," *Entertainment Weekly*, 14 December 2001.
43. Ann O'Neill, "Keeping Their Distance at Premiere," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 August 2001.
44. Notably, Paula Wagner comprises half of Cruise-Wagner. Not only does this demonstrate her power as a Hollywood producer, it also appears to indicate gender equality within this production company. However, much of the reportage about *The Others* focused on Tom Cruise's dominant role in the company and relationship with Nicole Kidman. For example, see Jeannie Williams, "Kidman Stars in Cruise-controlled Film," *USA Today*, 26 July 2001.
45. Jensen, 39.
46. Martin Miller, "A Skyline that Won't Go Away: Much of the Public Wants the Twin Towers' Image to Endure," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 2001.

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ABSTRACT This essay examines the production circumstances of intertextual relations, and discursive contexts of *Abre los Ojos* (1997) and its remake *Vanilla Sky* (2001). Seen in combination, these films demonstrate a struggle for cultural power in a transnational field and provide notably different representations of transnational identities.

KEYWORDS transnational, remake, Spanish cinema, Hollywood, globalization

FILM REVIEWS

Dog Days (Hundstage)

Director: Ulrich Seidl. Producers: Phillippe Bober, Helmut Grasser. Screenplay: Veronika Franz, Ulrich Seidl. Director of Photography: Wolfgang Thaler. Editors: Christof Schertenleib, Andrea Wagner. © 2001 Allegrofilm. U.S. distribution: Leisure Time Features.

"We're about to enter the twenty-first century," says one of the passing characters in Ulrich Seidl's *Dog Days* (2001). In Seidl's vision, we can build up the urban landscape to our heart's content, expand our superhighways and strip malls as far as the eye can see—but we are still working with the same primitive bodies, hearts, brains, and sex organs that we have always had. Underpinning all progress is the chronic latent threat of a return to savagery, not in the form of some sweeping apocalypse, but in all those small daily moments when the limitations of the human stand starkly revealed: a lonely old widower taking out his dentures at bedtime and dropping them into a glass; a wrinkled, cellulite-riddled woman in an abusive relationship, pulling up her flab to snip her pubic hair with scissors.

Seidl has an accomplished and compelling eye for such grotesque moments and he frames them not only with a filmmaker's sense of the lushness of movement in space and time, but with a modern photographer's awareness of the flatness and confinement of the frame. Seidl begins and ends *Dog Days* with a series of static shots of people posed in familiar surroundings—sunbathers lounging on porch decks; a naked couple embracing against red curtains at a sex club—that have the disarming frontality of portrait photographs. In one memorably tight medium close-up, Seidl shows a woman riding in an elevator, trying to ignore an old man who is aggressively looking her body up and down: this oppressive juxtaposition of watcher and watched within a single shot inscribes the divided nature of Seidl's own voyeurism, always willing to push situations to extremes and bring out the worst in his characters, but at the same time bearing a seemingly troubled heart that sometimes goes out to the fragile lives whose pain he records.

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Dog Days (Ulrich Seidl, 2001): watcher and watched within the frame

If Seidl's earlier documentaries have garnered comparisons with Diane Arbus's calmly composed observations of human oddities, then *Dog Days*, his first fiction film, bursts convincingly into lurid Nan Goldin terrain, with its seedy nightclubs, its flashes of neon, and especially its battered women. In fact, *Dog Days* has two of these: a young beauty pageant winner, Miss Lower Austria (Franziska Weiss), whose boyfriend (Rene Wanko) is constantly accusing her of cheating on him (she is not); and the middle-aged teacher (Christine Jirku), whose paramour, Wickerl (Viktor Hennemann), brings home a clueless young stud named Lucky (Georg Friedrich) and tries to impose a *ménage à trois*. There are other stories, all taking place during the same summer heatwave and cross-cut by Seidl into a downward-spiraling tapestry of human misery: a salesman (Alfred Mrva) of home alarm systems is threatened by his clients at a housing co-op if he does not find out who has been keying their cars; a retarded or mentally ill girl (Maria Hofstatter) hitchhikes with various strangers, whom she regales with manic Top Ten lists and advertising jingles; an old man (Eric Finsches) seduces his housekeeper (Gerti Lehner) on the fiftieth anniversary of his marriage to his late wife; and a young married couple live in tense, angry silence after the mysterious death of their child, the husband (Victor Rathbone) pushing the wife away and the wife (Claudia Martini) carrying on affairs under the his nose.

So Seidl's title, we see, has two meanings: the sweltering humidity of summertime and a kind of evolutionary (or counter-evolutionary) cycle in which people begin to act more and more like their canine counterparts. Seidl's subject is the *limits* of the human—the human becoming all-body, becoming animal. "Heat always produces an exceptional kind of situation in people," the director has remarked. "When it's extremely hot out, people either become aggressive or apathetic." Dismissing all the typical movie-making ways of simulating heavy sweating (by spraying the actors down with water) as "tricks," Seidl chose to film *Dog Days* only when the air temperature topped 100 degrees and, going Nature one better, turned on the heat in the apartments he used as sets. The effect is palpable: the cast (made up of non-actors) drifts slowly in a haze, bleary-eyed.

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The heatwave

Is it the rigorous documentarian in Seidl who imposed this condition of verisimilitude—or is it the philosopher, who seems to want to show that most of our human energies are misdirected, misguided; in a word, *wasted*? Many of those static shots of sunbathers show them lying next to big unused swimming pools, whose shimmering blue water promises easy relief from the heat. But the sunbathers never go into the pools. Suggesting that there is an innate futility to all human endeavors, Seidl demonstrates the ways in which people displace their true emotions into furious, compulsive, even self-defeating activity. The feuding husband and wife also have a swimming pool: a sunken, drained one that the husband uses as a handball court, pounding out his rage with tennis ball and racquet. Brilliantly, Seidl establishes a feeling of hours spent at this pastime in a sequence of a few shots that move rapidly from late afternoon light to early-sunset dimness and finally to darkness.

Watching *Dog Days* we discover truth not as a result of the emoting of actors, but simply by observing the characters' actions, which always seem to hover at extremes of banality or barbarism. When the film is not simmering up to the boiling point or exploding outright into violence, it is deliberately and overwhelmingly mundane: we see the old man mowing his lawn, the teacher picking at a cold chicken carcass in her kitchen. Like the conversational style of the hitchhiker, who rattles off her nutty Top Ten lists ("Do you know the ten sexiest TV news anchors?") and the ingredients in mass-produced foodstuffs, all the day-to-day activity in Seidl's film is little more than "factoid" behavior, performed by rote and lacking in genuine meaning.

Factoid behavior—shopping, driving, housework—cements the social order together in its comforting routines, but has a depressingly numb and deadened quality. Ultimately, it has little to do with the characters' true humanity. Almost by contrast, the hitchhiker's nervous, out-of-context spouting of advertising jingles has the bizarre feel of dadaist poetry or nonsense rhymes for children; but she is wrong in her fundamental assumption that these quoted slogans and soundbites are a way to genuinely connect with other people. Ads are a widespread part of culture, but almost a "dirty little secret" of the culture, a zone apart from "polite" social intercourse, designed to work subliminally and never enter the *conscious* mind. To remind people of the ways in which they are conditioned by advertising on a daily basis becomes an affront, virtually taboo. "You watch a lot of TV, don't you?" the salesman asks the hitchhiker, disparagingly. When she first makes her appearance, hurtling toward the old man in a supermarket parking lot, her bubbling-over energy and blue streak of dialogue seem completely antic by

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The anarchic, childlike hitchhiker

contrast with the dull, quotidian pace Seidl has been establishing in previous scenes. By hurling her own storehouse of factoids at the hapless Samaritans who agree to give her rides, the hitchhiker both affirms the universal discourse that holds society together and at the same time seems to mock it, revealing it to be a parade of hopeless banalities.

On the other side of the banal factoid life lies barbarism. In *Dog Days* violence is not so much something transcendently evil or even particularly a source of power (many of the scenes of violence feel half-hearted, awkward, almost impotent; and in fact none of the characters achieves what he really wants by resorting to violence), but rather a way for the characters' true "humanity" to return and express itself. Violence is the only element in life that *is not* a factoid, memorized, pre-packaged and dished up for easy consumption. To an extent, this is also true of *Dog Days*' occasionally graphic sex scenes, fumbling and largely unconvincing attempts to regain a human nature that has been somehow denatured. These sex scenes are also tinged with irony in their very matter-of-factness. When we first see the adulterous wife, for instance, she is having a threeway at an underground sex club, stark naked, bobbing up and down like a would-be porn star, but still wearing her clunky tortoise-shell glasses, a funny indication that some part of her has not been completely abandoned to this act.

Seidl gives some of the most appalling nudity in *Dog Days* to the "ugliest" of his couples, the old man and his housekeeper. She bears a vague resemblance to Linda Hunt and toward the end of the film she performs an arthritic striptease for the old man, grotesquely wiping her baggy white-cotton panties all over her sagging body while he smirks with approval. (Set to a woozy, 1930s-style tango, these scenes of loopy, repellent Eros resemble the perverse fantasies solemnly enacted by the hustlers in Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* [1991].) Although hysterically incongruous, the relationship between the old man and the housekeeper is handled by Seidl with a certain tenderness. In their most touching moment together, he asks her to put on his late wife's favorite dress and then plays a game with her where she has to search for the bouquet of flowers and box of chocolates he has hidden in the garden.

Such tenderness, however, cannot compete with the brutality of the world. Ironically, it is the hitchhiker, the most childlike and least sexual character in *Dog Days*, who is ultimately violated. Fearing reprisals from the co-op residents whose cars have been keyed, the alarm-systems salesman turns her over to the angry mob, who take turns torturing her for hours in an empty apartment; finally, one of the men rapes her. This showdown between the hitchhiker (a composite of consumerism and advertising jingles) and the salesman becomes a metaphor for the destructive energies of capitalism. She lives by the slogans and catchphrases used to sell products and hype celebrities, even though it is clear she has "dropped out" of the culture itself; she has no car of her own, after all, but is reduced to bumming rides from other people. In the end, a *salesman*, a key player in the economic system, turns on her and brings about her destruction. Is Seidl suggesting that a market economy always rises up against its own adherents and hangers-on, the "little dogs" who get eaten by the bigger ones? We see that the hitchhiker's life is expendable, no more important than the old man's Rotweiler, poisoned in the last scene, possibly also by the salesman, in revenge for the old man telling him earlier that a guard dog is the most reliable alarm system of all.

Seidl's critique is further strengthened, visually, by the fact that capitalism has totally effaced the physical landscape of *Dog Days* into an ersatz Westernized festival of kitsch. This is an anonymous Vienna; Seidl avoids showing any of the antique architecture that once defined this capital of the old world. Instead, we see the crass end results of the "Disneyland-ing" of Europe. Real estate developments, high-rises, superhighways, and strip malls all serve as backdrops for scenes of actual or threatened violence (many of these scenes look as though they could be taking place in America). Like worshipped totems losing their influence and becoming vestigial, the dehumanized (and dehumanizing) architectural forms of advanced capitalism elicit a tendency to destruction, graffiti, and vandalism; but this destruction ends up being visited mainly on the nondescript people who shuffle across the vacant parking lots, haunt the shopping plazas, and drive the endless highways.

The fact that the hitchhiker becomes a scapegoat for the pent-up tensions of the community is dramatized by

Seidl in the sudden thunder shower that breaks the heatwave immediately in the wake of her violation. Although she has been talking nonstop for almost the entire film, she loses her voice during and after her ordeal: the hitchhiker's function as "Greek chorus" is silenced and with it the sense of guilt and meaning which the classical chorus was meant to invoke in ancient cathartic drama. The other bedraggled characters, staring out at the rain, remain isolated and, for the most part, seem to find little real relief. And rather than blame this anonymous exurban wasteland—or indeed the system itself—for their increasing dehumanization, there is evidence that the characters come to support it more and more: on his scales at home, the old man weighs pre-packaged sacks of coffee from the supermarket and is angered to find that one of them is a little lighter than the others; he takes it back to the store, demanding his money back from the dubious manager. If human variability happens to slip into the gear-work of mass production, it ends up being viewed as a cheat, an unfairness, a lie.

What makes the hitchhiker's rape so ironic (and sad) is how painstakingly Seidl has shown us that all of her love and human feeling were invested in mass culture and consumerism. She tries to teach one of her rides the advertising jingle, "Haka finishes your kitchen," set to the tune of the French Can-Can, now purged of any sexual innuendo and transformed into a nursery-school singsong. Her favorite pop song is a romantic ballad from the 1960s, "Monja," drenched in slow reverb —but over it, Seidl lays tracking shots of a shopping mall, the true object of the hitchhiker's longing. Later, Seidl uses similar tracking shots of a neon-lit strip mall, replete with McDonald's, while we hear the hitchhiker singing an old German hymnal ("Everlasting is Thy reign . . ."). If consumerism is shown to be a kind of modern belief system, the focus of fanatical devotion, we see that religion itself has degenerated into another form of consumerism. "I like the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus," the hitchhiker says. "I've got a statuette at home and 'Lordes' water. The bottle looks like the Virgin Mary, and you can unscrew her head. And the 'Lordes' water is inside." "You mean *Lourdes*," her driver corrects her, but the distinction hardly seems to matter to the hitchhiker's enjoyment of this "holy object" as a tchotchke, or the absurdity of a society's attempt to mass-produce "miracles."

Real transports of the spirit never get very far, bogged down in tawdriness and animosity. There is a flurry of scenes in the middle of *Dog Days* where many of the characters begin to sing to each other, as a way of attempting to connect or, more often, to spar, to take back personal identity against the threat of hostile encroachment. The adulterous wife and her lover (Christian Bakonyi) begin to seduce each other by duetting a Greek drinking song; the manic husband drowns them out by shouting a nonsense ditty: "The little horse goes *hop, hop, hop*!" Likewise, as part of their escalating violence against the middle-aged teacher, Wickerl and Lucky demand that she sing "La Cucaracha"; instead, she sings the love aria from *Carmen*, in a surprisingly strong soprano. The men drown her out, bellowing and gyrating in an obscene dance. I do not think it is coincidental that Seidl has so many of his characters singing; his use of frail amateur voices, easily drowned out, offers a harsher vision of loneliness and isolation than the celebrated group-song montage in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999), but the idea is similar: we all yearn to connect on a pure, spiritual level, but ultimately cannot achieve this. If it is true that people can become more fragile and childlike when they sing, more emotionally open, then Seidl demonstrates that this childlike fragility (in the hitchhiker, especially) becomes an immediate target. The fractured, wandering *a capella* voices of the characters in *Dog Days* are the discordant music of subjectivity that has lost itself and gone astray, trying to sound its way home in the dark like a bat.

Fearful of being too vulnerable in a heartless world, love always turns cruel in *Dog Days*, even sadomasochistic, and can only express itself as tenderness under extreme duress. At one point the husband, at the end of his rope, holds a gun on his wife's lover, but not to harm him; he orders the astonished lover to drink a beer with him, as if the two men were buddies. Later, Lucky, ashamed at having helped Wickerl beat and violate the teacher, holds a gun on this couple and forces her to berate him, slap him, and finally burn his hand with a cigarette; but instead of enjoying this act of turning the tables on her abuser, she breaks down sobbing and comforts Wickerl, telling him she loves him. In fact, this

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Gunpoint intimacy: the husband and his wife's lover

questionable moment where a woman affirms the right of her boyfriend to abuse her is one of the few moments in *Dog Days* that could conceivably be described as "romantic."

But even this love, as Seidl has already shown, is really just a substitute for a deeper, more primal bond, that between the teacher and her elderly mother. When we first see her arriving at her apartment, the middle-aged woman plays back her answering-machine messages, the first of which is from her mother, a rambling litany of aches, complaints, recriminations ("Why don't you call me?"); while this message plays, we see the teacher impassively going to the bathroom with the door open, changing her clothes. Then, with a harsh electronic bleep, the mother's voice gives way to the second message, Wickerl proclaiming the teacher as "my favorite tush!"—a crudity that erases the cringe-inducing guilt of the mother's voice while at the same time reifying it in a further lowering of the woman's self-esteem. It is a compact mini-essay on Freud (perhaps the most famous of Austria's native sons, after all): the painful emotions that surround the relationship with the mother get deferred into the "easier" romantic attachment with the man, but because of the psychical remainder left over from the mother, we see that this romantic attachment soon becomes difficult and painful as well.

Freud is not the only historic Austrian evoked in the teacher's apartment: her walls are decorated with Gustav Klimt prints. The most famous of the Viennese Secessionists, Klimt painted pictures full of sexual angst and malevolence, where sensual arousal goes hand in hand with terror, torture, and pain. Klimt is the painter *par excellence* of the sadomasochistic imagination. When Lucky first returns to the teacher's apartment after her violation, he tells her that at first he enjoyed abusing her, fascinated "to see how some people can act toward other people." This is almost a description of Seidl's own philosophy, and the mixture of pain and pleasure that attends upon watching *Dog Days*. But what has grown out of this morbid fascination is a feeling of love for his victim: to her astonishment, Lucky attempts to kiss her. She pushes him away and he tells her that, for him, love is pain: "it hurts" when you fall in love and then when you fall out of it again.

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Sadomasochism against a Klimt background

This theme of the past's baggage, weighting the individual down in the present, comes up again and again in *Dog Days*. Both Lucky and the young man who is dating Miss Lower Austria announce to their respective love objects that every girl they have ever loved has cheated on them, let them down, hurt them. It is their broken, disillusioned hearts that make them violent toward women—not a convincing excuse for their behavior perhaps, but one that acknowledges the problems of surviving any kind of heartbreak. For these young men, love has become irredeemably painful, so their girlfriends must accept a certain amount of pain in order to love them. For Seidl, sadomasochism is not so much a specific and identified taste or fetish as an inevitable part of what it means to try to love anyone in the first place: sadism is a compensation for masculine fears of vulnerability; masochism is the coin of devotion paid by the female who loves. One might balk at this implication that sadomasochism could be considered an inevitable, practically a universal condition, but in terms of the couples in *Dog Days*, the director makes a fairly convincing case.

It is also baggage from the past—the death of their child, symbolized by a makeshift crucifix on the side of a highway—that plagues the husband and his adulterous wife. Seidl films them visiting this crucifix in separate cars; she watches from the other side of the road and waits while he lays flowers; in this sequence the sightlines are similar to "normal" angle–reverse angle shots in conversation scenes, suggesting that the now-severed couple "speak" to each other only through their dead child. It is only after new devastations in the present—her affair—that they can begin a rapprochement about the past: during the rainstorm she goes outside and sits on the empty swing set and after a few moments, he joins her; they still are not speaking, but this shared activity, so redolent of childhood innocence, suggests that perhaps they will start again. Similarly, Wickerl and the teacher are brought back together by Lucky threatening them with the gun. He breaks them down to the point where they are helpless and clinging to each other, needing each other again. This is not Lucky's intention; he hoped to break them apart. When we gamble against our own pasts, we run the risk of reliving them, making them occur again in the present; but there is also the possibility of healing. So the old

man—on what would have been his fiftieth wedding anniversary to his late wife—seduces his housekeeper, recreating with her the love that has died.

Seidl has stuck to some of the grounding tenets of documentary filmmaking in *Dog Days*: he uses non-actors and though the script was plotted out by Seidl and Veronika Franz, the dialogue is largely improvised. Seidl seeks to capture his protagonists in their representative milieus, surrounded by the everyday objects that define them; he has a knack for the "prop" that perfectly exemplifies a character, that creates an instant, bull's-eye feeling of naturalism: the overstuffed armchairs and oil paintings of dogs in the old man's house, or, in the husband and wife's house, the huge garish fish tank that dominates the scene where she attacks him, trying to get him to open up and talk to her again.

This is also why Seidl has filled the teacher's apartment with Gustav Klimt prints: *Hygeia*, *The Stoclet Frieze*, and others. Her abuse at the hands of Wickerl and Lucky takes place under a "sofa-sized" reproduction of Klimt's strange early painting, *Idyll*, where a cameo of the Madonna and child is flanked by langorous nude Adonises. The hard-to-read symbolism of this frieze turns on the question of whether the male figures are there to protect or to threaten the nurturing female element that stands between them. Klimt insisted on a return of everything that had been repressed out of the smooth workings of social progress: his subjects are primal myths of the libido rising up to tear asunder the fabric of everyday life. In particular, female bodies in Klimt become pliable and plastic, twisted and elongated in ways that are physically impossible; or they are swallowed up in background patterns that reduce the female subject to the status of a decorative object.

Klimt's *Idyll* also presides over the scene where the crazed Lucky takes Wickerl and the teacher hostage, trying to make things right between them by an act of desperate violence. Lucky sticks a lit candle in Wickerl's buttocks and makes him sing the Austrian national anthem. "Land of hammers, with a bright future," Wickerl bellows tunelessly, "people with a gift for beauty . . ." It is Seidl's most outrageous, bitterly sardonic tableau, provoking both cringing and a kind of disturbed laughter, and it suggests that Seidl's *fin-de-siècle* vision, like Klimt's a hundred years ago, is filled with a deep disgust for propriety, for the gentility of social rituals.

The most pessimistic of the current European directors (Michael Haneke, Bruno Dumont, Catherine Breillat, and Gaspar Noe among others) proceed from the belief that the breakdown of modern society has rendered individual lives all but meaningless: these directors depict a human condition that has lapsed back into savagery, but it almost does not matter if the people in their films suffer pain or feel happy, live or die. For these directors, all of Western culture—even its vaunted freedoms, its sexuality and its art—is viewed as being played-out and wholly given over to the death drive. Seidl, on the other hand, has a streak of subverted romanticism; he seems to want us to care about his cracked-crystal characters: the hitchhiker's destruction, the husband and wife's tentative reunion, Wickerl's humiliation—all of these climaxes resonate with an appropriate thrum of sorrow, relief, terror. And yet these apotheoses are also tinged with the outrageous extremity of black comedy, Seidl's personal form of stylization. It is not as if the characters' lives were utterly meaningless, but rather, existing in quotation marks. "People can be so cruel"—the old man's remark after finding his poisoned dog—is not so much a convincing epiphany as perhaps a final tossed-off factoid, what we expect him to say at this decisive moment, and almost a thesis (under-)statement for *Dog Days* itself.

In true black comedy—the kind that operates in Luis Bunuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), Jean-Luc Godard's *Les Carabiniers* (1963), Werner Herzog's *Even Dwarves Started Small* (1970), or Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Satan's Brew* (1976)—disgust takes precedence over sorrow, disturbing situations are handled lightly, people are depicted as slightly ridiculous in their agony, and the actors or characters are so blatantly grotesque that it is often hard to sympathize with them, even when we recognize their fates as harsh. "Reality is always so much harsher than what you can show in a film," Seidl has said, sounding slightly defensive about the amount of violence in *Dog Days* while at the same time tipping his hand about how he views reality itself. The sardonic laughter that is occasionally provoked by his film is, finally, the triumphant response of the misanthrope who can sit back and revel in revealing people to be exactly as bad as he suspected in the first place.

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ABSTRACT In *Dog Days*, graphic sex and violence are presented as the only elements in life that are not banal, prepackaged "factoids." Observing his documentary-like tapestry of characters in various stages of coupling and uncoupling, director Ulrich Seidl suggests that sadomasochism could almost be considered an inevitable, universal condition.

KEYWORDS Seidl, Austrian cinema, sadomasochism, black comedy, pessimism

No Man's Land (Nikogarŝnja zemlja)

Director, writer, music: Danis Tanović. Producers: Frederique Dumas-Žajdela, Marc Baschet, Ĉedomir Kolar. Director of photography: Walther Vanden Ende. Editor: Francesca Calvelli. © 2001 Noé Productions, Fabrica Cinema, Man's Films, Judy Counihan Films, Studio MAJ–Casablanca. U.S. distribution: United Artists.

Although conflict in the Balkans has been out of the headlines for several years, Danis Tanović's *No Man's Land* (2001) stands out among other recent war movies for its strong indictment of the intertwined nature of war, global power, and media. The Bosnian-French-Italian-Belgian-Slovenian-Eurimages co-production remakes the subgenre of war satire and subtly questions conventional narrative structure. Its multiple countries of origin point towards its many differences from both contemporary U.S. and Balkan war movies: its point of view is not anchored in any one national perspective, but sees a local ethnic conflict from a roaming vantage point, moving between two soldiers from opposing sides stuck in a stalemate, hamstrung U.N. officials, and an intrusive TV journalist. Though produced in October 2000, the film was released in the U.S. in December 2001, in time to be nominated for and win the Best Foreign Film Academy Award. Tanović, a Bosnian and first-time feature filmmaker, has created a quietly original film that captures the ironies and simulations of contemporary wars more thoughtfully than the in-your-face realism of *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and its U.S. imitators.

To bring out the fundamental elements of the war satire and show the ways in which *No Man's Land* distinguishes itself, some brief remarks on another distinctive war satire, David O. Russell's *Three Kings* (1999), are helpful. The two films have many parallels, beginning with what I call the "missing war"—soldiers inactive, journalists desperate for a scoop, and the rest of the world watching the conflict through oversaturated TV coverage.[1] *Three Kings* juxtaposes comedy and action melodrama to make a political statement about the absurdity of the (first) Gulf War. Similar to *M*A*S*H* (1970), the comedy turns on the lack of combat: American soldiers aimlessly shoot a nerf football or a cow while they wait for action. Then the film finds its narrative trajectory and its characters find their moral compass when they observe the suffering of the Iraqi people and help a group of dissidents escape. The initially innovative film becomes more conventional as American characters become the heroes, rescuing the victimized locals. Here the film switches gears from postmodern satire to action melodrama, performed through heroic actions, "in the nick of time" rescues, and dialogue which creates emotional connection between characters. Narratively and stylistically, then, *Three Kings* is based on juxtaposition and transition between the comic and melodramatic modes, suggesting that the comic mode is a reflection of U.S. consumer capitalism, while the melodramatic mode reflects true humanitarian values.

No Man's Land also features dry humor and the lack of combat but right in the middle of a very dirty, real war. Geographically speaking, this is literal: a Serbian and a Bosnian soldier are trapped in a trench in

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No Man's Land (Denis Tanović, 2001): trapped together in the trench

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no-man's-land, between the front lines of the opposing armies. The comedy is not in juxtaposition with more serious moments, but felt as a grim irony underneath every action. In part, this reflects a Balkan tradition of bitter humor as a survival mechanism,[2] but *No Man's Land* is distinct both from the dark comedies set during wartime and the serious war dramas because it is actually a (semi-)comedy on the battlefield—a hybrid of these two genres. For U.S. audiences, it is also significant that in a film about international intervention, there is no U.S. protagonist to lead us into the foreign conflict and therefore the film de-emphasizes the role of the U.S. in global power relations. The characters are actors on a world stage: they switch languages with ease, understanding that their lives are constantly about crossing borders. To use a film metaphor, Tanović represents the Bosnian war as an ensemble cast of nationalities rather than a star vehicle.

The plot outline mimics the political story of the conflict it depicts, progressing from an extremely personal and localized incident to one of global involvement. When two soldiers, the Bosnian Ĉiki (Branko Djurić) and Nino (Rene Bitorajac), find themselves caught in the trench, the situation seems awkward but not tragic—until they discover another Bosnian soldier who was presumed dead, but now comes to consciousness. They realize that Ĉera (Filip Šovagović) is lying on a "bouncing mine," a particularly heinous American-made weapon which explodes not when an object presses down upon it, but when the object releases pressure. Now in addition to being trapped in the trench until nighttime, Ĉiki is bound to try to save Ĉera, whose death seems inevitable. Long scenes in the trench follow, in which Ĉiki and Nino argue over who started the war, physically injure each other, and get to know a little about each other's pasts. The sense of entrapment and waiting is communicated through a sliver of blue sky and trees (the world outside the trench) at the very top of the frame and by a restrained, almost completely diegetic soundtrack of birds and insects chirping. The landscape robs the conflict of any epic quality, forcing it into dirt and stripping it down to essentials.

The sense of endless waiting contributes both to the film's deconstruction of the war genre and to its dark comedy. Over and over, characters expect something to happen and it never does. When Ĉiki finds a gun and shoots Nino, Nino falls to the ground, filmed from a high-angle shot suggestive of Ĉiki's point of view. (Tanović often films from various subjective angles to underscore his point that wars always have multiple points of view, especially one with so many nations involved.) The camera then switches to a low-angle shot from Nino's point of view looking up at Ĉiki with the gun, the blue sky behind him. As Nino closes his eyes, bracing for the impact that will end his life, the camera again lingers on him from a high angle and waits, but no gunfire comes. He opens his eyes, only to see the same low-angle view of blue sky with no Ĉiki, who has silently disappeared. There was no climax, neither in violence, dialogue, nor action (one could imagine a dramatic gesture of Ĉiki putting down the gun and making a show of sparing his life). The incident trails off rather than ends, our curiosity about what happened only answered with another cut to a long shot of Ĉiki who has moved to another part of the trench. For Tanović, the agony of war becomes pain that is drawn out over hours: Ĉiki and Nino killing time, Ĉera forced to have a bowel movement in his pants, and finally his implied slow death when every other human is forced to abandon him in the trench. In this way, *No Man's Land* defies any association between the action genre and the war genre. For to equate the two is to say that war has a narrative, which is to say action that leads to a climax and a resolution. Tanović rejects this assumption, instead showing how war is about the tension of waiting for something to happen. The fact that the "something" we wait for throughout the film (the mine exploding) never happens, underscores his point that it is not a narrative but rather an ongoing and unpredictable series of events. The only reason it "stops" is because the media and the world community decide to focus their attention on a new story.

In this sequence, the irony arises from our (and Nino's) expectation of action and the film's denial of such an expectation. The very "missing"-ness of the combat is a source of humor at other moments. We leave the trench for a moment to witness soldiers lounging at the front lines listening to upbeat music on the radio. One is reading the newspaper and deadpans to the other: "What a mess in Rwanda!" Another element of Tanović's satire is the unnatural and sometimes comic situations war creates. After Ĉiki shoots Nino, he forces him to strip down to his underwear and get on top of the trench waving a white tee shirt to let the armies know their whereabouts. Tanović cuts back to the same soldiers on the front lines as they see Nino hobbling around and ask each other: "Is he ours?" "It's not written on his boxers," another replies. The casual dialogue and understated editing, which juxtaposes a point-of-view shot through binoculars of Nino looking clownish with medium shots of the poker-faced soldiers, creates a sense of absurdity as the status quo. In

contrast to the pop culture-saturated humor of *Three Kings*, in which the American soldiers initially laugh because they are removed from human suffering, until the film "teaches" them compassion, the humor of *No Man's Land* is born of men immersed in suffering. Laughter helps them navigate a war that does not make sense, one between fellow countrymen. *No Man's Land* never becomes a true comedy: it is not laughter the film evokes so much as a grim smile.[3]

With the introduction of the U.N., the film reaches a new level of absurdity. The French Sgt. Marchand (Georges Siatidis) learns of the trapped men and decides to investigate. When he requests a mine expert, his superiors forbid him from acting until their hand is forced by Jane Livingstone (Katrin Cartlidge), an aggressive "Global News Channel" journalist (with a little behind-the-scenes help from Marchand). Thus begins *No Man's Land*'s critique of global media and the representation of war. Global significance is bestowed upon a local conflict either by politicians of dominant countries (who are absent in this film) or the media. In this case the world begins to care because Jane is able to seize on the human-interest potential and make a random accident into a "story." The U.N.—without the power to narrativize itself—must play catch-up.

So in the presence of cameras, the commander of U.N. troops in Bosnia flies in by helicopter and tries to cast himself and his organization in the role of "hero" by bringing the mine expert. When it becomes clear that successful resolution of the crisis is impossible (the mine cannot be defused), the best thing the U.N. can hope for is to win the public-relations battle. They drag out a fake body on a stretcher, pretending it is Ĉera's and telling the journalists he is heading to the hospital for treatment, while the mine expert sits silently in the trench with Ĉera, out of sight of the media. This performance of power wins the war on the international TV screen, but not on the ground. The juxtaposition of waiting in the trench and the artificial performance of action is part of Tanović's strategy of countering the satisfying narrative flow of a Hollywood war movie. The subject of war is a good fit for classical narrative because it has two opposing sides and a naturally adversarial structure, which allows for conflicts, a climax, and a resolution. *No Man's Land* repeatedly negates the war narrative: first, by presenting two adversaries who are paralyzed and unable to fight, and then by revealing the creation of false narratives to hide the inability of powerful institutions to make progress.

Related to Tanović's deconstruction of war narrative is his refusal to designate a true hero. Sgt. Marchand seems a potential hero in contrast to the blundering and bureaucratic U.N. After receiving orders to stay put, Marchand is restless, asking "why the fuck are we here?" He answers himself sarcastically: "To stop the killing, except we can't get into dangerous situations or use force." Marchand's decision to go into the trench and then get the media involved is based on common sense and humanitarian values, the reactions of a man who insists on a rational response to an irrational situation, but he is undermined by the indifference of global politics and the brutally simple reality of the mine. If a hero is a character who *acts*, Marchand is ultimately prevented from playing this role due to the insane situation in which he tries to intervene.

As a representative of the media establishment, Jane Livingstone seems to have more power to affect change than Marchand. Like Marchand, she is somewhat at odds with the institution to which she belongs, but Tanović gives her less moral clarity than him. Her motives seem to be both noble and self-serving, while the network headquarters is concerned exclusively with being competitive in the media marketplace. Cuts to the network headquarters in London when colleagues give Jane instructions reveal their ignorance of the conditions on the ground. Their impossible demands and the instant communication between Jane and headquarters expose the structure of global news: technology masks the very real geographical distance between the reporter on the ground and the editorial staff, distance that represents the gap between lived experience and consumption of images. Jane and her reality are

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Jane's attempt to entice Nino with a cigarette . . . meets with a bitter response

just images to the network. This is graphically illustrated by shots in the newsroom in which employees talk to Jane's picture on multiple T.V. screens.

Ultimately, though, the geographies of power override physical proximity. For all her good intentions and on-the-ground reporting, Jane will always be more closely tied to her colleagues at network headquarters than to the two soldiers. She attempts to act as a translator, funneling information to viewers (both the assumed TV audience within the world of the film and us watching the film) in a format that is recognizable and dramatic enough to hold our attention, for the purpose of alleviating suffering. But her very strategy of shaping events into a climactic plot structure makes her a metonym for Hollywood and Western media. When Jane approaches the trench, she tries to speak English to the men, asking "how they feel" and trying to bribe them with cigarettes. She is startled by their anger towards her: when Nino understands the questions she is asking, he throws the cigarette back and flicks her off. Jane's position high up in the frame reaching down towards Nino in the trench with the cigarette and Nino's head barely above the bottom of the frame, is a perfect visual enactment of their power relations and the way in which Jane is simultaneously part of their reality and on a different plane. While she is aware that publicity is a tool to leverage a humane reaction to the situation, her attempt to make the soldier's ordeal into a melodrama seems like an insult to their suffering.

Language barriers also separate those who operate on a global stage from Ĉiki and Nino, the provincial players locked in their private conflict. One of the film's most wrenching ironies is that Ĉiki and Nino are closer to each other than to anyone else, like squabbling siblings. The U.N. officers try different languages with everyone they encounter, always settling on English as the common one. Jane and Marchand frequently switch between English and French. But everyone who tries to converse with Ĉiki and Nino is met with incomprehension while the bitter enemies speak the same language

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The soldiers in no-man's-land

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The shooting, reaction to it, death through the lens

—theirs is the only fluent communication in the film. When Nino tries to translate U.N. instructions for Ĉiki with his tiny bit of English, Ĉiki snaps: "I don't need a translator." Language keeps them figuratively in the trench even when they physically leave it.

The power of *No Man's Land* comes from blending elements which are traditionally opposite (the comic and tragic modes, two sides in a war) in order to expose the real conflicts of our times: the global versus the local and the real versus the mediated. The final sequences stage these conflicts in powerful visual terms. As everyone converges on the trench, it is as if there are two plays occurring on the same stage. The foreigners roam in a crowd—blue-helmeted U.N. soldiers (constantly made fun of as "Smurfs") trying to rein in the swarming journalists—while Ĉiki and Nino, who have been escorted out of the trench, are each framed alone, glaring at each other in a series of shot–reverse shots. At one moment Ĉiki yells at the crowd surrounding the trench: "You're [U.N. soldiers] all the same! And you vultures [journalists] film it. Does our misery pay well?" The two soldiers share disdain for the journalists and the U.N., as well as the common experience of war and the trench, but at the same time they will always be

separated by their hatred. An abstract hatred based on ethnicity—which was almost overcome during a few conversations early in the movie—has evolved into personal hatred due to the small acts of violence each man has inflicted on the other. While the world will move on, Ĉiki and Nino (and the groups they represent) remain inextricably tied to each other.

The simmering glares and cross-cutting between Ĉiki and Nino finally burst into violence when Ĉiki shoots Nino and is himself shot by a U.N. soldier. The only real action sequence in the film is shown with a quick series of medium shots, isolating each move that escalates the violence. The sound of camera shutters is overlaid with the gunshots, underscoring the connection between media and modern warfare. Tanović then contrasts the physical witnessing of a violent act with the mediation of the same act: a medium shot of Ĉiki's lifeless body is bathed in the amber light of early sunset, followed by a grainy video duplicate of the same shot, as if through the lens of Jane's cameraman, who nods when she whispers "Did you get it?" She is split at this moment: horrified and moved at the spectacle of death, but never forgetting her quest for newsworthy footage. The video shot is followed by a series of silent reaction shots, including the network employees watching their wall of TV screens. The deaths puncture through the invisible barrier of images, producing real emotion in those who are culturally or geographically removed from suffering.

However, it is just a moment and the professionals (Jane and the U.N. commander) get right back to business. As they pack up to leave, Jane's cameraman asks her if he should film the trench and she replies: "A trench is a trench; they're all the same." If she had agreed, she would have discovered Ĉera still lying there and would have gotten the truth of the situation as well as the much sought-after "story." With this move, Tanović suggests that the narrativizing tendencies of the media—building up two sides, showing conflict and resolution, creating pathetic victims in need of rescue—are vastly ill-suited to the realities of war. The news waits for (or creates) a climax in the action; it cannot stick around if the plot is going nowhere. Ultimately, the words Jane uttered earlier for the camera in a dramatic tone are still true: "The absurdity of war continues. How will this all end? Stay tuned."

The last moments of the film mirror the beginning, a comic episode of Bosnian soldiers who could barely move because of a thick fog. This time it is sunny and

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The media drives away while the U.N. soldier remains

clear but there is a new and more tragic sense of paralysis. The camera switches to an overhead shot of Ĉera's body, his stomach moving slowly up and down as he breathes. We hear insects chirping, reminiscent of the long scenes in the trench. The camera stays on him for so long, moving slowly upwards, that a viewer expects some sort of movement—might he move just so the mine will explode and his agony will end? No, he stays still and eventually the shot fades to black. The black screen, with its return to the haunting female voice heard at the beginning of the film, suggests that the camera is incapable of capturing a real ending for the film (and the war). True war is the breakdown of image and narrative—and yet in contemporary times, "wars" are created based on these very fictions.

NOTES

1. The concept is similar to Jean Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul patton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) and other critiques of the Gulf War as a "media war" except these films rely on the *juxtaposition* between reality and simulation rather than a realm of pure simulation.
2. See Andrew Horton, "Laughter Dark and Joyous in Recent Films from the Former Yugoslavia," *Film Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (fall 2002): 23–28.
3. However the comedy of *No Man's Land* is more humanizing—almost an assumed innocence in the face of absurdity—than another dark comedy from the region, *Cabaret Balkan* (1998), whose humor is more sadistic.

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ABSTRACT Set during the Bosnian–Serbian war, *No Man's Land* is an intimate drama of two opposing soldiers stuck in a trench. The peripheral presence of clumsy U.N. commanders and overly dramatic TV journalists contributes to a satirical and wrenching look at the intertwined nature of war, global power, and the media.

KEYWORDS war films, satire, media, Tanović, Balkan cinema

William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice

Director, adapted screenplay: Michael Radford. Producers: Cary Brokaw, Barry Navidi, Jason Piette, Michael Lionello Cowen. Director of photography: Benoît Delhomme. Editor: Lucia Zucchetti. Music: Jocelyn Pook. © 2004 Shylock Trading Limited, UK Film Council, DeLux Productions S.A., Immagine e Cinema. U.S. distribution: Sony Pictures Classics.

Released in the wake of the controversy about the representation of Jews in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Michael Radford's version (also 2004) of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*—the first completed film adaptation in English—arrived not so much spoiling for a fight as flinching in anticipation of one.[1] As if to head off any possible confusion as to where its sympathies lie, the film begins with a didactic account of the bitter economic and social restrictions imposed upon the inhabitants of the Jewish ghetto in early modern Venice. We then see the titular Christian merchant Antonio (Jeremy Irons) spit upon Jewish moneylender Shylock (Al Pacino); this act of everyday prejudice is intercut with scenes of anti-Semitic violence as well as the burning of sacred Hebrew texts. Not a word of Shakespeare's play has been spoken. The film's opening montage preempts the play with dramatizations of Jewish oppression.

This preliminary sequence no doubt serves to contextualize the play for a contemporary film audience, but it also betrays a protective anxiety. This is understandable given that the play's recent production history is overshadowed by its use as Nazi propaganda. According to historian Gerwin Strobl, there were fifty productions of the play just before World War II in Vienna alone and the play was popular with the official propagandists of the National Socialist regime in Germany and occupied France.[2] After Auschwitz, the case can be made that one has an ethical duty to stage the play only if one does so precisely in order to exorcize these troubled spirits. But can one do that and still stage the comedy written by Shakespeare? Watching the film that follows these uneasy introductions and comparing Radford's screenplay to Shakespeare's text, the strain is obvious. It is as if, in order to bear witness in an acceptable manner, Radford felt that the audience had to be protected not only from the danger of a misreading, but from the text of the play itself—when that play presents a Jewish villain, makes a Jewish character the butt of jokes, or seems to urge us to admire characters who express troublingly anti-Semitic or racist views. The result is a film so at odds with the text it adapts that, far from establishing the endlessly renewable relevance of Shakespeare's work to our own historical moment, it seems instead to index the intractable gulf that separates us from contact with that work.

Before assessing Radford's transformations, it is worth noting that Shakespeare's play was itself an act of adaptation. *The Merchant of Venice* fuses together two folk tales, the tale of the pound of flesh (based upon a contemporary Italian source) and the tale of the three caskets (from Roman antiquity), into an intricate dramatic structure; its two settings, masculine Venice and feminine Belmont, mirror and critique each other.[3] Profligate Venetian playboy Bassanio (Joseph Fiennes), already in debt to the melancholic Christian merchant Antonio, asks to borrow yet more money in order to woo the heiress Portia (Lynn Collins) and so repay his friend. Acting on his behalf, Antonio, whose fortunes are tied up at sea, takes a loan from Shylock, who reminds him of the anti-Semitic abuses we have already witnessed. Shylock half-jokingly proposes that if Antonio fails to pay his debt on time, he must grant Shylock a pound of his flesh "to be cut off and taken / in what part of your body pleaseth me" (1.3.146–47). But wealth alone cannot guarantee Portia's hand. Bound by her father's will, Portia can only wed the suitor that correctly guesses which of three caskets (gold, silver, and lead) contains her portrait. Following a sequence of comic scenes in which a parade of caricatured suitors try and fail to solve the riddle, Bassanio arrives, pays court then chooses correctly, winning Portia's hand and her fortune. When Antonio's ships founder and he cannot pay the debt, Bassanio must return and struggle to prevent Shylock from collecting his gory collateral. In the play's climactic trial scene, Portia, disguised as the wise young Doctor Balthazar, famously intervenes, at first granting Shylock's suit but urging him to show mercy and then, when he insists upon the strict terms of his bond, reversing Shylock's fortunes in a witheringly literal application of precise legalism. Portia's sermon upon the universality of mercy jangles harshly with the cruelly selective protections that the laws of this Christian society afford: Venetian law specifically forbids the shedding of Christian blood. In seeking the terms of his bond, the "alien" Shylock is deemed to have plotted to kill a Christian. His own life and wealth are therefore forfeit. The scene ends with Shylock's property transferred to his daughter Jessica, who has eloped with a Christian; Shylock himself is sentenced to forced conversion.

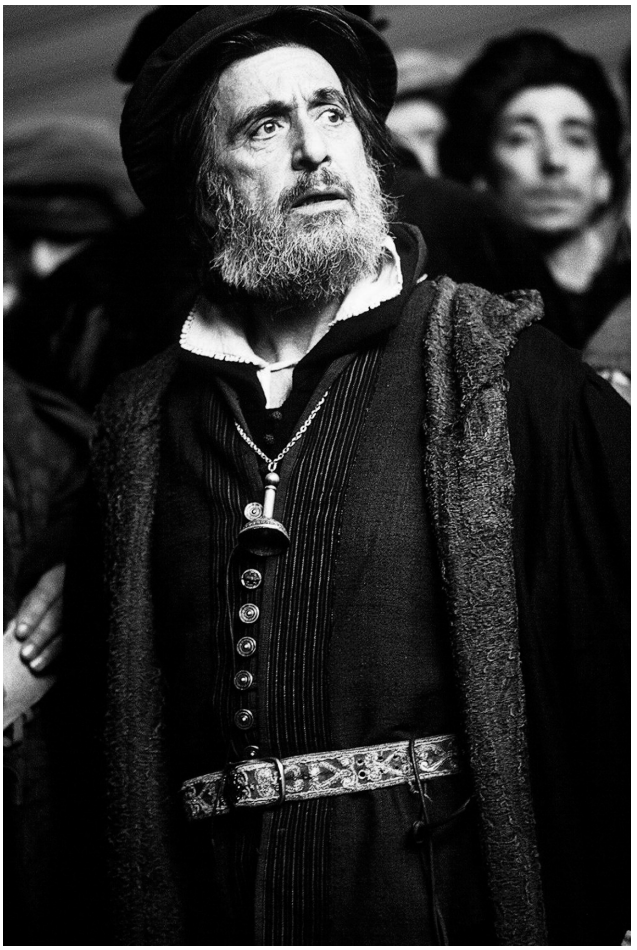
Modern film adaptation of Shakespeare must, before anything else, deal with both the sheer length of

Film Quarterly, Vol. 60, Issue 1, pages 52-56. ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2006 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm.

the plays and the density of their language. Radford's film omits elaborate set pieces (particularly from minor characters) in the interest of narrative flow. Shylock's fascinating but confusing retelling of the parable of Laban's sheep and Antonio's "I am a tainted wether of the flock" (4.1.114) speech during the courtroom scene are both cut. These notorious cruxes have launched a thousand close readings, but they hinge upon either scriptural familiarity or abandoned vocabulary (a wether is a castrated ram) and so risk baffling a contemporary audience. These are cuts which help translate the play to the screen.

That said, omissions are never neutral and when we factor in both the subtractions from the text and Radford's additions to it, the film's problematic agenda becomes apparent. Radford's adaptation enforces a strong distinction between comic scenes and dramatic scenes, in opposition to Shakespeare's insistent mixture of the two modes. This is an age-old difficulty. Indeed, for the many eighteenth-century critics of Shakespeare, this mixture is *the* primary problem with him as a writer. Even his contemporaries felt that his tendency to combine low comedy with high drama was a sign that he lacked control, that he was, in the words of Robert Greene, a "rude groome" who either did not know what he was doing or was simply striving to please a vulgar audience.[4] This assessment of a powerful but unruly and loose imagination is epitomized in Ben Jonson's quip: "His wit was in his owne power, would the rule of it had beene so too."[5]

In *The Merchant of Venice*, this somewhat dusty quibble about genre has real force because what is objectionable is its combination of anti-Semitism and comedy, something much harder to stomach than mere clowning in a graveyard. What is a contemporary adaptation to do? The obvious solution is to turn this anti-Semitic comedy into a comedy *about* anti-Semitism. It has certainly been possible to selectively edit Shakespeare's play in order to expose and critique the religious and political ideology of anti-Semitism. Productions in Yiddish at the People's Theatre in 1901 and in Tel Aviv in 1936 vividly testify to this possibility.[6] But it is worth noting that two distinct boundaries are superimposed in such progressive adaptations. There is, firstly, within the play itself, Shakespeare's own continuous disruption of the distinction between, on the one hand, comic, light-hearted, and festive elements, and, on the other, suspenseful, dramatic, and, in the implications of the removal of the pound of flesh, fatally serious ones. Then, secondly, in the historical chasm that separates us from Shakespeare, there is a distinction between what could have been, and indeed would have been, played for laughs, and the bitter aftertaste which those same comic scenes and characters produce in us today. On the Elizabethan stage, Jews were stock villains, caricatures left over from the "Vice" tradition of medieval Passion Plays, frequently outfitted with comedy noses and grotesque curly red wigs, proudly boasting of poisoning wells and murdering sick people in their beds. Barrabas, the energetic villain of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, exemplifies this tradition.[7] So a generic division within the text between its comic and its dramatic elements is intensified by a historical division between the early modern and modern definitions of what can and cannot be laughed at. What was already jarring in its day is doubly so in our own, for if Shakespeare's willingness to interweave humor with deeply unpleasant suspense poses an artistic problem, his willingness to deploy a Jewish stage villain to inspire laughs and jeers from an implied anti-Semitic audience compounds the damage by posing an ethical problem.



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Al Pacino as Shylock in *William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice* (Michael Radford, 2004)

The particular kind of anxiety triggered by *The Merchant of Venice* derives from a broader anxiety about our access to Shakespeare; more awkwardly, beneath this longing for access, there is a deep-seated and narcissistic longing to culturally resemble Shakespeare. To take a cue from the title of Jan Kott's influential book, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (1965), there seems to be a cultural longing for a Shakespeare who is, somehow, already one of us: we want a Shakespeare who shares our inclusive humanist values, a Shakespeare who is condemning intolerance, not endorsing it. The trouble is that this particular play is to some degree intractable and so modern critics and viewers often seek to find a way to reconcile their admiration and their revulsion. After seeing a production in 1839, Heinrich Heine wrote that: "Shakespeare perhaps intended originally to please the mob . . . but the genius of the poet, the spirit of the wide worlds which ruled in him, was ever stronger than his own will . . . and so Shylock, despite the glaring grotesqueness, expressed the justification of an unfortunate sect which was oppressed by providence."[8] More recently, the French literary critic René Girard has argued that Shakespeare acted as a kind of double agent by providing a cartoon Jew for the anti-Semitic mob, while sneaking into his text a subversive thread of critique—an anti-anti-Semitism for the educated viewer to decipher.[9] Radford's film tries to occupy this same shakily optimistic position. Radford's selective screenplay and Pacino's urgent performance work in concert to transform the text's meaning and reassemble the play, wrenching Shylock away from the context of the Jewish stage villain and, somewhat ironically, moving him closer to the position of Christ, enduring martyrdom at the hands of a mob.

Despite the film's anxious revisions, Shakespeare's original play relies upon and at least partially reinforces the anti-Semitic prejudices and ugly stereotypes of its era. The play's poetics repeatedly align Jewishness as a trait with the inhuman, imagining Jews as subhuman animals or even demons. From the mutterings about his master from the clownish servant Lancelot Gobbo ("certainly the Jew is the very Devil incarnation," 2.2.26) to Antonio's impassioned speech in which he describes Jews as wolves and asks rhetorically if there could be anything harder than a "Jewish heart" (4.1.80), there is a wild profusion of depictions of the Jew—but these disparate voices are united in their negativity, which is not merely descriptive, but categorical. The mere word "Jew" is itself used as an insult. Revisionists may claim that such sentiments do not correspond to the overall impact of the play itself, but are merely distinct lines within it. Yet when we survey the course of the plot as a whole, and in particular when we recall its generic status as a comedy and consider the punishments and rewards meted out in its conclusion, there is an inescapable sense in which the anti-Semitic energies of *The Merchant of Venice* are neither peripheral nor ironic, but central to its meaning. Consider the implication of Jessica's conversion: she is a virtuous pagan and a "sweet Jew" (2.3.11) precisely to the extent that she willingly repudiates her Jewishness and abandons her heritage; that she and Lorenzo have Shylock's wealth bestowed upon them at the close of the play as a reward for their betrayal is the crowning insult.

In order for the play's depiction of Jews to count as substantively ambiguous, one would need to see Jewish traits or qualities not only being denigrated and scorned but also, at least occasionally, being praised: but the "hath not a Jew eyes" speech, the *locus classicus* for those who hope to rescue the play from the charge of anti-Semitism, when read closely, not only fails to elevate the Jew above the level of sentient animal (for even pigs and goats can also see and bleed) but, at its zenith ("if you wrong us, will we not revenge?," 3.1.56), it hinges upon an ethical declaration which would have functioned as a clear confirmation for its intended Christian audience of the irreducibility of a specifically "Jewish" moral error. Rather than confirming the ethical equivalence of Christian and Jew, this equation of justice with revenge is meant to signify Shylock's stubborn adherence to the Old Testament *lex talionis*. It is intended to mark a fatal—and fatally "Jewish"—difference for its Christian listener.

The most obvious pleasure this film adaptation affords is the cumulative gravity of its lead actor's performance. And yet this very performance constitutes the most glaring example of the film's struggle with the tone and meaning of the play it adapts. Inevitably influenced by his definitive turns in *Scarface* (1983) and *Carlito's Way* (1993), we already see Al Pacino as the embodiment of a struggling ethnic minority whose will to survive at all costs leads to criminal excess and tragic over-reaching. This character template configures Pacino's American Yiddish-accented Shylock; its rise-and-fall narrative logic guides his interpretation of the role. His performance commences with the clammy, guarded shoptalk of contract negotiations then rises to the righteous Jericho-blast of the "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech (which he delivers with absolute conviction and considerable power), and finally reaches a crescendo in the manic, bloodthirsty repetitions of Shylock's demand for the pound of flesh in the courtroom scene. There, repeating Shylock's "Tis mine" (4.1.99) three times, Pacino's relentless pursuit of his bond risks inad-

vertently calling to mind not only Tony Montana and Carlito Brigante, but Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* films (2001–3). Finally broken by the order to convert to Christianity, Pacino's Shylock falls on his knees and rocks pitifully back and forth in an eerie echo of the impassioned *daven*-ing of an Orthodox Jew.

Much must be disavowed or simply cut out in order to make this more sympathetic Shylock emerge. When Shylock sees Antonio arrive to sign the bond, in Radford's film we hear Pacino say "How like a fawning publican he looks," but we do not hear the line that follows it: "I hate him because he is a Christian" (1.3.37). Such a line would confirm Shylock as a threatening figure of intractable "Jewish" hard-heartedness who is being set up for his comeuppance in the play's climax. From the dramas of Plautus and Jonson to the silent films of Chaplin, Lloyd, and Keaton, comedy deals in such broadly sketched types: the tramp, the wealthy man, the poor girl, the cop, the precocious child. In early modern stage comedy, the figure of the miser is just such a type—and Radford and Pacino emphasize it here. I assume that this line was cut because it was thought to undermine our sympathy for Shylock; if the aim is to engineer the play into an exposé of Christian anti-Semitism, this line and others like it throughout the play have to go, while others must be re-emphasized or downplayed in order to shore up a less offensive interpretation. After his daughter Jessica (Zuleikha Robinson) robs him of jewels and money in order to elope with her Christian suitor Lorenzo (Charlie Cox), Shylock rages "I would my daughter were dead at my foot and the jewels in her ear" (3.1.80–81). Pacino neutralizes the venom in this line, playing it as the impotent whimper of a hurt father rather than the icy curse of a heartless miser. What is left out is the seam of comic ridicule at Shylock's expense. Smothering such alternate possibilities, Radford rounds this out with shots of Shylock softly crying out his daughter's name, soliciting a sympathetic reaction to a man robbed and betrayed by his oppressors.

Yet, confusingly (but tellingly), those very oppressors are themselves granted the benefit of some rather flattering editorial decisions. After the Prince of Morroco (David Harewood) takes a chance on the wrong casket and is sent home in despair, in the play Portia heaves a starkly racist sigh of relief: "A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go / Let all of his complexion choose me so" (2.7.78–79). This line was cut by Radford and for obvious reasons; he wants to play the casket scenes for laughs, but not *that* kind of laugh. If Portia is seen as racist in the film, which she certainly is in the play, Radford perhaps feared that a contemporary audience would not emotionally invest in her—and the film's construction of her as the voice of Christian mercy in the courtroom scene would be compromised. It is a safe choice with an eye on the box office, but it is also an index of the gulf that separates us from Shakespeare's time; it prompts reflection upon the circular, self-confirming nature of such screenplay decisions. We can safely conclude that an audience will not be able to dislike a mixture of good and evil that they have not been shown in the first place.

Radford's screenplay also omits darker undercurrents from comic scenes—and correspondingly removes comic possibilities from the moments of high drama. At the peak of the climactic trial scene, when Portia, in transvestite disguise as the young Doctor Balthazar, declares that the law cannot deny Shylock's suit for the pound of flesh, Bassanio desperately utters a rash and characteristically empty vow, offering to sacrifice his wife in place of his friend:

> Antonio, I am married to a wife
> Which is as dear to me as life itself,
> But life itself, my wife, and all the world,
> Are not with me esteem'd above thy life.
> I would lose all, ay sacrifice them all
> Here to this devil, to deliver you.
> (4.1.278–83)

In Shakespeare's play, the hidden wife in question responds immediately with a tart understatement: "Your wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you make the offer" (4.1.284–85). In this lightning flash of a comic aside to the audience (the wife is all too close, though the husband does not know it), Shakespeare underlines with a light comic touch the moral ugliness of Bassanio's betrayal of his love for Portia. Downshifting from humor to an altogether earnest sincerity, the adaptation omits these lines and replaces the broadly comic banter with a shot of Lynn Collins's Portia silently registering a deep emotional wound at Bassanio's callous remark. Comedy with dark undercurrents is replaced by a ponderous sincerity.

The emotional core of this moment is one which has a particular resonance within Michael Radford's work, for the betrayal of the beloved in the face of the threat of torture lies at the heart of a previous literary adaption (this time from George Orwell's novel) which Radford directed, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984). In that film's climactic torture sequence in Room 101 of the Ministry of Love, the phobic civil servant Winston Smith (John Hurt), when faced with the threat that a cage full of starved rats will attack his face, finally breaks down and betrays his lover, crying out to his torturers:

"Do it to her! Do it to Julia." State violence registers its domination precisely in its ability to lead us to volunteer others to suffer in our place; clearly there is something in this dark vision that appeals to Radford because his adaptation revises Shakespeare's play to fit the contours of a purely tragic pattern inflected by the nightmares of the twentieth century. One can see this anachronistic morphology at work in the knife-edge sadism and brutality of the trial scene. Jeremy Irons's Antonio vomits and passes out before being stripped to the waist and lashed to a chair in preparation for Shylock's carving of his body. The chair strongly resembles an electric chair and the proceedings take on the bureaucratic chill of a modern execution. In a powerfully evocative moment of sound design, we hear the knife being sharpened in a horror-struck courtroom.

If we take all of these examples of Radford's cuts, directorial decisions, and his cast's performances together, we can see the broader issue plainly: because of a commitment to a polarized artistic vision in which dramatic scenes are kept earnestly "serious," if not tragic, and comic scenes are purged of their dark undercurrents, the virtuoso balancing act that Shakespeare achieves in his plays—in which comic scenes turn nasty, courtroom dramas are interrupted with clowning outbursts, and heroes and villains are often reversible—is avoided in favour of a simplified morality tale. Radford's film is on sure footing when it is engaged in an ethically admirable and historically accurate project of depicting Jewish oppression, but precisely at those moments it struggles desperately with the comic machinery and fairy-tale logic of Shakespeare's play. If Shylock is to truly be the moral hero of the play, then we must correspondingly view Portia and Antonio as cruel and cynical bigots. Unwilling to pursue this logic to its end, Radford's film attempts instead to sympathize equally with each character, padding the sharp corners until the dramatic shape disappears. Radford's compromise ultimately betrays Shakespeare's Christian and Jewish characters by levelling down his play's vision of their differences for the sake of a smoothly digestible universality. The film ends with a telling moment of utter fabrication that encapsulates the spirit of this adaptation: the converted Jessica looks at her hand and fondles the turquoise ring that her father gave her mother Leah, a ring which the play clearly tells us Jessica has already given away "for a monkey" (3.1.99) while out on the town with her Christian accomplices after her elopement. The return of this ring is pure wish fulfillment, an expression of the same refusal of Shakespeare's hard lessons that led eighteenth-century directors to have Cordelia revive at the end of *King Lear*. The cinema audience has a robust sense of logical continuity and will not fail to ask how a ring that has already been given away can be returned to Jessica. The problem is that Radford wants us to like each and every character in the play. Jessica could not really have given away a family heirloom so easily, he assures us. As a directorial fiat, this final *coup de grâce* is pushy, willful, and gratuitous. But as a symbol of this film's pained ambivalence about our obligations to the troubling inheritance of the past, it is a perfect Hollywood ending.

NOTES

1. The play's film history begins with *Il Mercante di Venezia*, an Italian silent version made in 1910 by Gerolamo Lo Savio. Orson Welles completed filming of his own adaptation in 1969 but, bizarrely, the majority of the soundtrack for the film went missing during production, and so his *Merchant of Venice* remains incomplete; the full story is given in the documentary *Orson Welles: The One Man Band* (Vassili Silovic, 1996). There have also been numerous productions for television.
2. Gerwin Strobl, "The Bard of Eugenics: Shakespeare and Racial Activism in the Third Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34 (1999): 323–36.
3. Though the tale of the bond of flesh ultimately traces back to Persian and Indian antiquity, Shakespeare's play has been traced most directly to an Italian source, Ser Giovanni's *Il Pecorone*; the tale of the three caskets comes from the *Gesta Romanorum*. I have consulted the 1955 Methuen edition of *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown.
4. Robert Greene, *Groats-Worth of Witte, Bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592), ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1923), 46.
5. Ben Jonson, "Timber: Or, Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter" (1641), in *Collected Works* 8, ed. H. Herford Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 584.
6. Avraham Oz, "Transformations of Authenticity: *The Merchant of Venice* in Israel," *Jahrbuch Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft West* (1983), 156–68.
7. See also James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
8. Heinrich Heine, "Shakespeare Justifies an Unfortunate Race," in *The Merchant of Venice: The Critical Tradition*, ed. William Baker (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 54.
9. René Girard, "To Entrap The Wisest," *Literature and Society: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Edward W. Said (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 100–19.

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ABSTRACT Lingering controversy about anti-Semitism has kept *The Merchant of Venice* off the screen. Michael Radford's 2004 film adaptation creates a critique of anti-Semitic violence revealingly at odds with the play's comic form. This review considers the challenge Shakespeare's art poses to the ethical imperatives of contemporary filmmaking.

KEYWORDS Film adaptation, Shakespeare, Pacino, anti-Semitism, Girard

BOOK REVIEWS

Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust

By Joshua Hirsch. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004. $64.95 cloth; $22.95 paper. 240 pages.

I have always cast my lot with those who stand for interdisciplinary research and creative endeavor. On our Santa Barbara campus of the University of California, for example, Professor Dick Hebdige has led the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center in a number of programs that have shocked and inspired participating scholars and artists; "Home Free?"—a coordinated series of events about shelter, security, home, and homelessness—was designed as a response to a University Art Museum exhibit of a standardized shipping container that had been converted by a firm of architects into a fully functional living space. It is from this perspective of cross-disciplinary exchange that I recommend Joshua Hirsch's *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* as a volume that locates its eponymous, linked subjects in the still broader context, described in the bookstore-friendly, back-cover subject list as media/philosophy/history. Hirsch's superb command of Holocaust history, archival film collections, and contemporary theories of modernism and posttraumatic historical consciousness informs his insightful analyses of how certain cinema practices can facilitate understanding between groups and so help heal the effects of traumatic experience. And, as with the most productive interdisciplinary research, Hirsch's book is also anchored by a trenchant approach to Holocaust cinema. *Afterimage* exemplifies the merits of film writing based on in-depth knowledge of cinema history, theory, and criticism.

The clarity and originality of this book are evident throughout: in its crystalline conceptual design, in its textual analytic rigor, and in its conscientious definition of terms ("flashback" is discussed with respect to its use in psychology as well as cinema criticism; "form" and "content" are carefully imbricated). Hirsch's elegant textual analyses of documentary and fiction films—that is, his regard for the specificity of the medium—along with his expert use of concepts imported to film studies make for compelling and informative reading.

In the book's eloquent preface and introduction, Hirsch sets out his project to trace a coherent pattern of filmic expression threading through a subset of what we know as "Holocaust films." These works constitute a "posttraumatic cinema," he argues, by repeating the traumatic experience of witnessing—or being unable fully to witness—catastrophic events of the Holocaust. The particular films under study, Hirsch makes clear, are significant not necessarily because they take the Holocaust as their subject, but rather because they draw on certain formal properties of cinema to mediate historical understanding of Holocaust trauma. *Afterimage*, therefore, locates its corpus in relation to a theoretical paradigm for studying "the particular problems the Holocaust has posed for the cinematic representation of history" and, somewhat conversely, "the particular opportunities the cinema has afforded for the representation of the Holocaust" (xi).

Hirsch makes a point of weighing in on various debates in the larger field of Holocaust studies. With regard to the singularity of the Holocaust, he argues the necessity to avoid both "anti-Jewish" denials of the Holocaust's historical specificity and divisive assertions of the Holocaust's incomparability to other genocides (xii). And he contends that trauma-studies paradigms have their limits and potentialities for comprehending Holocaust memory, depending on how the relationship between event and affect is formulated by a given writer on trauma. Hirsch asserts the need to be cognizant of the real impact of traumatic events and of the psychological restructurings to which they are subject.

Drawing its core strength from theoretical concepts and debates in film studies, *Afterimage* proceeds by relating issues of posttraumatic Holocaust representation to the history of realist, modernist, and postmodernist literary and cinematic narration in the United States and Western and Eastern Europe. The posttraumatic films around which chapters two through five are built—*Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955), *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1965), and a semi-autobiographical trilogy by István Szabó—do not fall into one category or another, but rather "stage a collision" between "realism's discourse of omnipotent representation and modernism's discourse of the impossibility of representation" (25). Chapter six continues by examining how *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) and *History and Memory* (Rea Tajiri, 1991) exemplify two rather different forms of postmodernist representation. Hirsch's film analyses are guided and interrelated by attention to "tense, mood, and voice," three narratological concepts adapted from Gerard Genette's method of literary analysis. This approach allows Hirsch to interrogate each film's perspective on past and present temporality as well as its own process of narration.

Also commendable is the author's decision to bring both documentary and fiction films into the ambit of posttraumatic cinema. This mix is actually fairly common in the literature on Holocaust films because of the primacy of theme and authorship as criteria for inclusion. See, for example, Ilan Ivisar's *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Indiana University Press, 1988); Barbie Zelizer's edited volume *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (Rutgers University Press, 2001); books on Alain Resnais; and writings on *Schindler's List* and *Shoah*, including key chapters in Yosefa Loshitzky's *Spielberg's Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 1996). But Hirsch goes further than previous authors by taking seriously and addressing explicitly the formal potential of each respective mode of filmmaking. The chapter on *Night and Fog* contrasts this modernist documentary to classical realist predecessors exemplified by a French newsreel and a Swedish compilation film. Posttraumatic narration must in some way "referenc[e] historical reality," he writes, and therefore "[I]t is no accident that posttraumatic cinema originated in the documentary" (85). But it certainly did not end there, according to Hirsch. The foregoing sentence inaugurates a chapter on "*The Pawnbroker* and the Posttraumatic Flashback"

in which Hirsch compares Resnais's hybrid masterwork, *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), and several other posttraumatic and historically referential fiction films, to Lumet's feature.

Overall, the book is erudite and sophisticated in its address and contribution to ongoing debates about Holocaust representation. For example, Hirsch's discussion of Lanzmann's epic documentary *Shoah* takes seriously and yet also convincingly disputes certain claims by a number of eminent scholars, including Dominick LaCapra, Gertrud Koch, and Shoshana Felman, who have written at length about the film. But I do wish *Afterimage* were more thorough in its discussion of previous writing about Holocaust cinema. One does not want a book to get bogged down in literature reviews and I acknowledge the job of the book reviewer to draw comparisons even when, or especially when, they are not made by the author. But additional references to prior works on Holocaust films would have enhanced the project by making it all the more evident that *Afterimage* absolutely does deepen certain arguments, dispute others, and strike out in new directions. For example, although Annette Insdorf's seminal *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Random House, 1983) begins with the statement that "Filmmakers and film critics confronting the Holocaust face a basic task—finding an appropriate language for that which is mute or defines visualization" (xiii) and goes on to discuss formal elements in several of the same films treated by Hirsch, he has elected not to delineate the distinctions between their respective projects. Michael Roth, in *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (Columbia University Press, 1995), reads *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, *Shoah*, and, more briefly, *Night and Fog* in a section entitled "Memory, Trauma, and Mourning." And I do not know whether the timetable of university press publishing allowed Hirsch the opportunity to consult Alan Mintz's *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (University of Washington Press, 2001), but the book contains a reading of *The Pawnbroker* that seems to me to raise certain points similar to those that Hirsch develops differently. Mintz writes: "In making dreams into flashbacks [in the process of adapting the film from the novel], Lumet was able not only to fashion a cinematographic equivalent to the dreams but also to push the point further by making these eruptions disturb Nazerman's [the protagonists's] waking rather than sleeping mental state"; and "*The Pawnbroker* supports the notion of the survivor's self as construed entirely under the sign of rupture" (115). Assuming access to Mintz's book, it might have been productive for Hirsch to have contrasted Mintz's interest in a character's posttraumatic experience with his own interest in the posttraumatic qualities of a film text.

Hirsch is attuned to the many levels of posttraumatic discourse—in textual operations, historical consciousness, and catastrophic past events. And his movement between these different levels is brilliant. Chapter one opens with a stunning story of traumatic witnessing: in 1941, in Latvia, a German naval officer and amateur cinematographer named Rienhard Weiner happened onto a horrifying spectacle and the result is footage like no other. It is important that the reader of *Afterimage* learn the details of this story in Hirsch's own words, so I will not say more, except to note that references to this footage resurface throughout the book, allowing modal connections between autobiographical fiction, historical fiction, and documentary to be made.

A final level of posttraumatic witnessing is Hirsch's own. Reflecting on a shocking early experience of watching *Night and Fog* followed by later multiple viewings, Hirsch reveals that this repeated "encounter" with the film brought home to him the frailty, the necessity, and the hurt of history and memory. Like the viewers of Weiner's footage and the audiences of the films he discusses, Hirsch himself is subject to "vicarious trauma." Borrowing this term from the field of psychology, he suggests that the experience of trauma may be relayed from one person to another through the circulation of images with traumatic potential (although "There is no such thing as a traumatic image per se," Hirsch cautions [16]). In the best-case scenario, this relay may help establish a "collective space of traumatic historical experience" (26), a "fully functional living space," one might say, to combat the recurrence of atrocity. And for Hirsch, the child of a Hungarian survivor, the stakes are personal as well as historical.

Ending the book with an account of *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1992)—not a Holocaust film but Rea Tajiri's groundbreaking autobiographical documentary about the U.S. internment of Japanese Americans (including Tajiri's mother)—Hirsch widens the call for empathetic, second-generation historiography. As the film's own critical discourse makes evident and as prior writers have discussed (and I should acknowledge that I am one of them), *History and Memory* writes into history the experience of trauma while at the same time exploring the limits of audiovisual expression, documentary evidence, memory, and historiography in a realist mode.

Afterimage contributes substantially to film studies and surely also to the field's reputation in a wider arena. Coherent and affecting, the book remains on the mind.

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Choosing the so-called "love goddess" of the 1940s, Rita Hayworth, as her primary subject, Adrienne L. McLean has made an original contribution to the field of star studies with *Being Rita Hayworth*. Without claiming she can read the minds of the audiences of the past, she uses primary documents to reveal how Rita Hayworth was promoted, discussed, and sold to

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Choosing the so-called "love goddess" of the 1940s, Rita Hayworth, as her primary subject, Adrienne L. McLean has made an original contribution to the field of star studies with *Being Rita Hayworth*. Without claiming she can read the minds of the audiences of the past, she uses primary documents to reveal how Rita Hayworth was promoted, discussed, and sold to

the public in her own era. McLean presents her arguments in two main sections. Part one (Hayworth off screen) is a discussion of how a dancer named Margarita Carmen Cansino was transformed into "Rita Hayworth" and how the drama of her personal life was written about in the popular press. Part two (Hayworth on screen) provides textual analysis of four key Hayworth movies, discusses the "women's musical," and defines Hayworth as a dancer and active agent in her own career. McLean's work is significant because it addresses a major flaw in the majority of star studies—the lack of knowledge regarding how movie stars were created by the Hollywood studio system. She achieves an understanding of movie stars as economic constructs, of the relationship of their real selves to their images, and of how a star's original meaning and reception by fans sometimes differ from what we assume today.

In refusing to remove the actress from her own era, working life, and talent, McLean has effectively used non-academic sources such as movie magazines (*Life* and *Look*) and studio advertising materials. This does not mean she is unaware of other scholarly studies which introduce her concepts of labor and identity or which question received wisdom about the past as a world in which women always wore aprons. In particular, *Being Rita Hayworth* uses Danae Clark's *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995) as a basis from which to move away from the relationship of spectator/image considerations toward a more practical examination of an actor as a worker caught between their real self and an industry-constructed self. Her revisionist text regarding ways of seeing Hayworth's film work parallels Joanne Meyerwitz's collection, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Temple University Press, 1994).

Since I was a movie-goer during Hayworth's heyday, I can attest to the accuracy of McLean's well-researched premise that no secret was ever made of the way in which Margarita Cansino had her name changed, her hair dyed, and her hairline raised on her way to becoming Rita Hayworth. Her home studio, Columbia Pictures, openly sold this transformation from Latina beauty to All-American pinup girl and it was not the only studio to use the star's true story. Hollywood sold the dream of movie stardom as if it were readily attainable ("You, too, can have your hair dyed and name changed") and, for certain stars, made sure that the public related to their past traumas (June Allyson's broken back), anxieties (Gail Russell's desperate shyness), dissatisfaction with Hollywood (Jean Arthur's constant complaints), and unexpected beauty problems (Joan Crawford's freckles). In Hayworth's case, the studio even made no secret of the fact she usually didn't sing for herself. (For other non-singing dancers, such as Vera-Ellen and Cyd Charisse, the dubbing was not publicized.) Hayworth's transformation, being dramatic and spectacularly successful, made good copy and so did her very sensational personal life. Her first husband, a car dealer, sold her into show business; her second was Orson Welles, who remade her looks to suit himself; her third (with more to come) lifted her out of the extraordinary and into the stratosphere of off-screen sensation. He was playboy Prince Aly Khan and when she married him in 1949, Hayworth became Princess Rita, the darling of the international press. McLean shrewdly documents how Hayworth's off-screen publicity directly connected her professional labors as a dancing star to her private labors as wife and mother. McLean points out that "for much of her career she seemed to matter most as someone who found it extraordinarily difficult to negotiate competing demands of family, domesticity, and professional labor" (3). This quality increased her appeal to women in the audience; they identified with the struggle.

McLean respects Rita Hayworth as a working woman. Furthermore, she suggests that Hayworth was an active agent in her own success because underneath the glamorous publicity façade lay a real career that she worked hard to achieve. McLean feels that Hayworth's talent—particularly her dancing—gave her a degree of control that has subsequently been obscured by ideological feminist scholarship. Without denying the difficulty any female (or male) star had in negotiating a place inside a studio hierarchy, McLean questions whether it is valid to assume that Hayworth was nothing more than an object. She traces how scholars began in the 1970s to "collapse the meaning of the very vital Hayworth" (4) and recreate her as a pathetically manipulated figure. Hayworth's Hollywood career was defined as a classic example of how Hollywood exploited females. In particular, McLean cites biographer Barbara Leaming as having foregrounded Hayworth's allegedly incestuous relationship with a domineering father as a key factor in her life as a victim of abuse and male control.

McLean defines Hayworth as a dancer, an active creator inside a moving image and not a passive beauty photographed for display. She pursues this concept without prejudice, subtly implying that, just as Hollywood transformed Cansino into Hayworth, scholars transformed her into an object useful for their own agendas. She closely examines four of Hayworth's key films: *Gilda* (1946), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), *Affair in Trinidad* (1952), and *Down to Earth* (1947), defining the last as a "women's musical." It is clear she regards Hayworth to have been a highly talented dancer. To prove her point, she discusses dance as theoretical construct, dance as sex, dance as rebellion, dance as pleasure, dance as threat to the established order, dance as serious professional activity (she writes extensively of Hayworth's *Affair in Trinidad* collaboration with modern dance choreographer Valerie Bettis), but not really dance as art. Since dance *was* Hayworth's art, this seems an unfortunate omission. She also does not fully analyze the way musical numbers are shot and edited, which can contribute to the viewer's perception of the performer. However, McLean's overall knowledge of the films, their production and reception, and their generic origins is excellent.

McLean's work is particularly noteworthy because of its impeccable research. Anyone who wishes to learn about a star under contract to Columbia Pictures is aware of the lack of archival access. As McLean succinctly puts it in the Acknowledgments to her book: "Columbia remains an archival blank spot . . . melancholy rumors continue to circulate about whether its archives even exist." Despite this, *Being Rita Hayworth* is a model of good scholarship. She has laid out her arguments, supported them, and answered her critics in ad-

vance. From time to time, she lapses into jargon, but mostly her book has a highly readable quality.

McLean's conclusion about "being Rita Hayworth" is that the various Ritas—Margarita, Gilda, Princess Aly Khan, and so on—were active instigators of their various and complicated meanings. Having interviewed dozens of female stars of the "golden era" (not Rita Hayworth, although I discussed her with both Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire), I can attest that the majority definitely did not view themselves as victims. They believed themselves to be pioneer career women who accepted studio transformations to further what they thought of as their *own* work.

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Beyond Life Is Beautiful: Comedy and Tragedy in the Cinema of Roberto Benigni

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The third book in English on the Italian actor–director (after Stefano Masi's *Roberto Benigni* [Gremese Editore, 1999] and Carlo Celli's *The Divine Comic* [Scarecrow Press, 2001]), *Beyond Life Is Beautiful* consists of twelve essays divided in two sections: "The Foundation," with contributions by David Scott Diffrient on *You Upset Me* (1983), William Van Watson on *The Monster* (1994), Umberto Taccheri on *Johnny Stecchino* (1991), Vittorio Montemaggi on Benigni and Dante, Rebecca West on *Pinocchio* (2002), and Victoria Kirkham (mostly on *Life Is Beautiful* [1997]); and "A Prismatic Look at *Life Is Beautiful*," entirely dedicated to Benigni's most (in)famous film, with essays by Gefen Bar-on, Laura Leonardo, Grace Russo-Bullaro, Erminia Passannanti, Mirna Cicioni, and Janice Wendl Fernheimer.

Already a look at the book's organization suggests that *Beyond Life Is Beautiful* will betray the expectations raised by its title and preface—in the latter, Grace Russo Bullaro remarks that Anglo-American audiences only know Benigni for the Oscar-winning comedy and ignore his multifaceted career, a situation her anthology sets out to remedy by focusing on the "influences and forces" which "will help us to understand the full, yet sometimes disputed or misunderstood artistry of Benigni; the one that goes beyond *Life Is Beautiful*" (36). If the first five essays do take readers on a journey beyond this film, the rest of the book forces them back into the claustrophobic space of Holocaust polemics. The feeling I had after reading *Beyond Life Is Beautiful* is that there is no beyond, that all beyond is a before, that all knowledge of Benigni's other works and activities, even of those occurring after 1999, is but a prolegomenon to *the* film.

The vast international reputation achieved by *Life Is Beautiful* came as a boon for Italianists in academia. At last, after years of stagnation (which was, at times, more an impression caused by distribution practices than an accurate reflection of the state of Italian cinema), an Italian film was riding the crest of media waves. Round tables and conferences mirrored the heated debate that spanned newspapers reviews and academic articles. A whole new sub-field had opened which went beyond strictly cinematic considerations and included not only politics and history, but also those other disciplines touched upon by Benigni's eclecticism, from philosophy through literature to popular culture. As a result, even professors usually working on other areas rushed to take an exceptional opportunity to valorize their cultural capital. *Life Is Beautiful* became a staple of courses in Italian cinema and culture in the United States.

Beyond Life Is Beautiful is a product of that situation and the anthology will be much appreciated by professors and students alike. It offers a magnified replay of the debates that surrounded the film's release *plus* a thorough introduction to Benigni (provided by the first five essays). That students of Italian (cinema) constitute this collection's implied readership is suggested by the presence of two essays in Italian as well as by a cognitive horizon at times more attuned to Italian than Film Studies. This does not detract from the book; it merely situates its readership. On occasions, however, statements such as "*Life Is Beautiful* inaugurates a new era of Italian cinema, in the tradition of Fellini" (173) will leave the reader wondering whether they are backed by a serious knowledge of cinema or are simply the enthusiastic byproduct of the "gold-rush" mood unleashed by *the* film.

Is there any substance to actor–director Benigni's work if we leave *the* film aside? It is an important question and three essays are noteworthy contributions to an answer. Diffrient's "Italian Sketch Films and the Narrative Genealogy of Roberto Benigni's *You Upset Me*" discusses Benigni's first film in the context of the some 150 episode films produced in Italy between Rossellini's *Paisan* (1946) and the Taviani brothers' *You Laugh* (1998). Diffrient provides readers with a most welcome, if perforce brief, panoramic shot of this important aspect of Italian cinema along with a thorough discussion of *You Upset Me*'s four episodes. Likewise, Van Watson's "The Italian Buster Keaton? Roberto Benigni's *The Monster* and the Comic Machine" situates *The Monster*'s attack on the conformity and "compulsory consumption" brought about by Berlusconi's media society within a discussion of Benigni's roots in the *Commedia dell'arte* and a reflection on the often repeated comparison of Benigni with Buster Keaton—"while Keaton primarily studies the society of machines, Benigni examines the machines of society" (69). Finally, Vittorio Montemaggi's "'Perché non ho scritto la Divina Commedia? Perché non c'ho pensato' ['Why didn't I write the Divine Comedy? Because I didn't think of it']: Dante's Commedia and the Comic Art of Roberto Benigni" is a provocative piece sure to raise more than one eyebrow. Using, as a point of departure, the director's successful recitation of the opening lines of *Paradiso* 33 at the 2002 Sanremo Festival (a popular music contest and one of Italian television's major, primetime events), Montemaggi teases out the similarities on the conception of love that can be found in the work of Dante and Benigni.

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The vast international reputation achieved by *Life Is Beautiful* came as a boon for Italianists in academia. At last, after years of stagnation (which was, at times, more an impression caused by distribution practices than an accurate reflection of the state of Italian cinema), an Italian film was riding the crest of media waves. Round tables and conferences mirrored the heated debate that spanned newspapers reviews and academic articles. A whole new sub-field had opened which went beyond strictly cinematic considerations and included not only politics and history, but also those other disciplines touched upon by Benigni's eclecticism, from philosophy through literature to popular culture. As a result, even professors usually working on other areas rushed to take an exceptional opportunity to valorize their cultural capital. *Life Is Beautiful* became a staple of courses in Italian cinema and culture in the United States.

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Is there any substance to actor–director Benigni's work if we leave *the* film aside? It is an important question and three essays are noteworthy contributions to an answer. Diffrient's "Italian Sketch Films and the Narrative Genealogy of Roberto Benigni's *You Upset Me*" discusses Benigni's first film in the context of the some 150 episode films produced in Italy between Rossellini's *Paisan* (1946) and the Taviani brothers' *You Laugh* (1998). Diffrient provides readers with a most welcome, if perforce brief, panoramic shot of this important aspect of Italian cinema along with a thorough discussion of *You Upset Me*'s four episodes. Likewise, Van Watson's "The Italian Buster Keaton? Roberto Benigni's *The Monster* and the Comic Machine" situates *The Monster*'s attack on the conformity and "compulsory consumption" brought about by Berlusconi's media society within a discussion of Benigni's roots in the *Commedia dell'arte* and a reflection on the often repeated comparison of Benigni with Buster Keaton—"while Keaton primarily studies the society of machines, Benigni examines the machines of society" (69). Finally, Vittorio Montemaggi's "'Perché non ho scritto la Divina Commedia? Perché non c'ho pensato' ['Why didn't I write the Divine Comedy? Because I didn't think of it']: Dante's Commedia and the Comic Art of Roberto Benigni" is a provocative piece sure to raise more than one eyebrow. Using, as a point of departure, the director's successful recitation of the opening lines of *Paradiso* 33 at the 2002 Sanremo Festival (a popular music contest and one of Italian television's major, primetime events), Montemaggi teases out the similarities on the conception of love that can be found in the work of Dante and Benigni.

Boldly, he suggests that "Benigni's work may be seen to share similar ethical and theological dynamics to the [*Divina*] *Commedia*" (113). At one point, Montemaggi even remarks that "it would be interesting to explore the extent to which one may . . . link Benigni's work to that of Primo Levi, Rabelais, Dostoevsky; or to that of theorists such as Bakhtin, Adorno, Buber, Fackenheim" (123). Debatable though his suggestions and comparisons may be (many would regard Benigni's as pure namedropping), his essay has the merit of forcefully introducing an element which is otherwise absent from the rest of the book, namely Benigni's difficult relationship with the divine.

Like several Italian directors before him, most notably Fellini and Pasolini, Benigni has mercilessly attacked the Catholic church only to reinscribe his undefined and undefinable spiritual needs within a framework that might make more sense in this secular age. Nowhere is this more evident than in the very film this anthology claims to subject to a "prismatic look." The second section fails to discuss what is surely *Life Is Beautiful*'s most significant aspect, its being a millennial reminder of the one "game" we can advantageously play even in desperate situations. Spirituality's absence from the "prismatic look" is a serious omission, especially in view of the fact that a 2003 book entirely dedicated to *Life Is Beautiful* was quick to notice and (mis)take seriously Benigni's spiritual agenda: Kobi Niv's *Life Is Beautiful but Not for the Jews: Another View of the Film by Benigni* (Scarecrow Press, 2003) sees that "il Gioco" (the Game) Guido plays with his son has strong religious overtones but argues that it is a subtle Christian plot aiming to justify the Holocaust. It is probable that Niv's book was published when *Beyond Life Is Beautiful* had already been assembled. Still, the failure to include spirituality in the anthology's "prismatic look" is symptomatic of the extent to which spirituality, religion, and theology exceed academics' horizon today. I cannot help remembering that Pasolini (who, incidentally, is pitched against Benigni in one essay) prophetically observed that Christianity's true enemy is not Marxism but consumer society, for the latter deletes the spiritual dimension altogether. Ironically, the essays showing contempt for consumer society and *Life Is Beautiful* alike fail to see in the latter the one dimension that can combat the former.

One final irony. A common motif in the arguments of "the Holocaust fundamentalists" (I must thank Bullaro's anthology for this expression) is that *Life Is Beautiful* pacifies its audience. The very existence of *Beyond Life Is Beautiful*, published six years after the film in the wake of myriads of articles and web reviews, is the proof that, far from pacifying, Benigni's film raised a storm, a storm which has intensely revived the memory of the Holocaust. I credit Benigni with enough intelligence to have anticipated this. If anything, this anthology's "prismatic look" should have included observations on why Benigni's film was so popular *because of* its Holocaust subject matter. Would Benigni have achieved equal popularity had he tested his spirituality "game" in relation to, say, the genocide of the Armenians?

MAURIZIO VIANO teaches film studies at Wellesley College.

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Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture

By Vivian Sobchack. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 328 pages.

Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture is a collection of twelve theoretical essays (both new and revised) by Vivian Sobchack. As such, it is an important theoretical intervention that brings phenomenology securely to the foreground of debates about the implications of contemporary visual media culture. Whether or not a reader possesses an avowed interest in phenomenology, any scholar who professes a desire to understand modern culture in relation to electronic media and film should pay attention to this book.

In essays that have their origin across a decade of intellectual engagement, Sobchack considers a wide variety of phenomena, from the perceived convergence of cinematic special effects with plastic surgery to the cinematic inscription of death; from the impact of technologies "on the experience of the lived body in the act of writing" (121) to Sobchack's own "prosthetic experience" (after the amputation of her left leg) that leads her to question the utopian "discourses of disembodiment" attached to the cybertech revolution (170). In spite of the title's generalizing reference to "moving image culture," one of the great strengths of this collection is Sobchack's refusal to flatten the differences between different media technologies and the experiences that they create in, through, and with viewers whose responses are grounded in the body as well as in consciousness.

Sobchack notes that "however much they both engage and contest each other and however much they borrow on each other's figures and metaphors, the material differences between cinematic and electronic representation emerge as significant differences in their historically lived meaning and value" (160). Sobchack's most detailed analysis of this issue is provided in one of the most impressive essays in the collection, "The Scene of the Screen.'" In it, she offers a persuasive revision of some commonly accepted notions of the historical and ontological relationship between photographic, cinematic, and electronic media and the perceptual orientations they stimulate. Altogether, the breadth of this book's coverage and the theoretical sophistication displayed in essay after essay mean that it is a major step forward for phenomenological inquiry into visual media. But Sobchack also advances her enterprise in a different way, giving it a much more personal dimension. Embodiment is not just considered as an abstract concept, but also in terms of her own body's engagement with the world and with modern perceptual (and other) technologies. In this respect, Sobchack follows a trend that extends beyond media studies or phenomenology.

Autobiographical writing is ubiquitous in twenty-first century culture—for, as Sobchack notes, we live in a society "increasingly driven to extreme extroversion, to utter disclosure" (45). While the impulse to blend reflection on one's personal life with the consideration of media representations has been demonstrated already in film theory (as in the work

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Autobiographical writing is ubiquitous in twenty-first century culture—for, as Sobchack notes, we live in a society "increasingly driven to extreme extroversion, to utter disclosure" (45). While the impulse to blend reflection on one's personal life with the consideration of media representations has been demonstrated already in film theory (as in the work

of Kaja Silverman or Laura Kipnis), *Carnal Thoughts* brings an unprecedented degree of appealing candor, good humor, and scholarly rigor to an approach in which personal revelation otherwise might cause some discomfort in those readers who expect the normative "objectivity" of a more traditional scholarly format. Because Sobchack is interested in illuminating the relationship between embodied experience, processes of perception, and historical and cultural systems of representation, her skill in merging reflections on her experience as a "lived body" with the "thick descriptions" of phenomenology makes this blend of objective and subjective knowledge seem absolutely appropriate to her project.

Underscoring the entire book is Sobchack's belief that there is a need to return to the importance of our existence as material beings as the foundation of our experience with the cinema and other visual media. As Sobchack states, her goal is to re-engage her readers with a sense of their status as "objective subjects and subjective objects"(4). Sobchack hopes to show "how the very nature of our embodied existence 'in the flesh' lays the concrete foundations for a *materialist*—rather than idealist—understanding of *aesthetics* and *ethics*" (3). Meaning and value are unashamedly at the center of this work. In taking an approach that builds on the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, and Don Ihde, Sobchack seeks to disclose the role of "carnal thought" in determining "the lived meaning, significance, and nonneutral value" of perceptual technologies and their representations (160). Thus, Sobchack embraces interpretation as part of a theoretical enterprise in which she seeks to unpack how apparently transparent, naturalized media processes engage the individual in experiences and representations that have the potential to transform both our sense of self and our understanding of the world.

In pursuing her goals, Sobchack blends autobiographical reflection with theoretical discourse in varying proportions. Some of the essays take the form of highly structured arguments and detailed textual analyses of films or media texts, as with "The Expanded Gaze in Contracted Space." This essay explores the specific aesthetic techniques employed by Krzysztof Kieślowski to create a cinematic world in which the "primacy and privilege of human existence" is questioned through a gaze that "*expands* to admit something within existence that is always potentially both awful and awesome" (91). By contrast, "Scary Women: Cinema, Surgery, and Special Effects," is described by the author as a "mediation" in which argument and analysis are set aside in favor of a more generalized discussion of the phenomenologically experienced, imagined, and represented consequences of the desire and anxiety surrounding contemporary American culture's treatment of aging women (36).

Exploring the viewing experience provided by Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1996), in "What My Fingers Knew," Sobchack offers one of the collection's most successful mergers of subjective and objective discursive modes. In this essay, she addresses how a film spectator is a "cinesthetic subject" whose encounter with the cinema engages multiple senses in the creation of meaning. In "A Leg to Stand On," another chapter that models the interface of memoir-inspired commentary with phenomenological inquiry, Sobchack interrogates the use of "prosthetic" as a metaphor for technoculture through the rhetorical entry point of her acquisition and use of a prosthetic left leg following cancer surgery. This chapter demonstrates also that Sobchack's success in exploring the overarching issue of embodiment is dependent on her ability to sustain an exceptional level of nuance. She is interested in reciprocal and reversible relations and in the workings of systems, but also in very specific manifestations of practice and in tracing the qualifications to experience—the phenomenological terms—that transcend normative expectations created by current theoretical discourse in its use of the metaphor of the prosthetic.

The cumulative theoretical power of Sobchack's attention to detail also gives scholarly weight to her lengthy consideration of the troubling aspects of the emergence of digital media and culture in relation to the lived body. This discussion emerges forcefully in two essays ("The Scene of the Screen" and "Beating the Meat"). In the former, Sobchack is led to suggest that electronic presence is "dangerous" in its phenomeno-logic because of "its lack of specific and explicit interest and grounded investment in the human body and enworlded action, its freefloating leveling of value, and its saturation with the present instance [that] could well cost us all a future" (159). In "Beating the Meat," Sobchack expresses her "anger" at Baudrillard's work and its affirmation of the techno-body at the expense of the lived body (166).

Sobchack might be called a "subjectivist" but she cannot be accused of being a sentimentalist. Her interest in the lived body and its "feeling" leads her to strive to understand the convergences as well as the differences that exist between images and bodies, imagination and practice, the body as an individual's "home," and the rest of the world. In attempting —and very clearly succeeding—in coming to terms with the "radical materiality" of viewers who have lived bodies, Sobchack encourages us to consider how embodied vision is related to "the material foundations for ethical care and consciousness and, perhaps, responsible behavior" (8). This emphasis on the ethical as well as the aesthetic emerges most strongly in "Inscribing Ethical Space" and "The Charge of the Real," both of which suggest that ontological complications can be found in the relationship between documentary and fiction and the impact of these on viewers' "ethical responsibility" as well as their "aesthetic sensibility." In choosing to call attention to the ethical as well as aesthetic dimensions of our media experience in a postmodern age, Sobchack may be making her most radical intervention of all and we can only hope that her future phenomenological investigations will continue to explore this repressed "intersubjective" aspect of our relationship to contemporary moving-image culture.

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Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1968

By Stephen Prince. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003. $62.00 cloth; $23.00 paper. 330 pages.

Classical Film Violence is Stephen Prince's third book on film violence. Adding as well an analysis of Akira Kurosawa's films, *The Warrior's Camera* (Princeton University Press, 1991) and an edited collection on *The Wild Bunch* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), he has been a consistently incisive contributor to a growing shelf of critical volumes on cinematic brutality and bloodletting. Even as new work appears about screen mayhem in Hollywood and beyond, Prince remains our foremost analyst of film violence. This new study is essential reading for anyone committed to the increasingly rich and varied scholarship on the topic.

Prince's current project explores "the interplay between the aesthetics and the censorship of violence in classical Hollywood films from 1930 to 1968, the era of the Production Code." The book consequently proceeds from two kinds of close reading: first, of the films and, more often, questionable or objectionable images or scenes that aroused controversy or concern for studios or the Production Code Administration (PCA) at their time of production; and, second, the case files in the PCA archives that detail the negotiation and frequent redesign of the images' eventual inclusion or exclusion in films. As demonstrated in *Savage Cinema* (University of Texas Press, 1998), his study of Sam Peckinpah's violent cinema, Prince has a gift for lucid description of cinematic "design" and, particularly, the often complex compositions, camerawork, editing, and effects that create images of brutality on screen. No one is better at analyzing closely the stylistics of violent images. Moreover, Prince very effectively articulates the linkages between images on screen and debates that took place among filmmakers, studios, and the PCA over what was permissible and even desirable for Hollywood's mass audience. Scrutinizing the relevant case files and a range of other industry records, Prince has managed to forge a new history of perhaps the already most frequently analyzed period of cinematic production, Hollywood during the so-called classical period.

"Classical" here refers to a cinema of violence shaped in important ways by the PCA. Prince repeatedly (and rightly) emphasizes that the PCA was not so much a top-down censor of studios and filmmakers as their facilitator in making cinematic productions that were appealing to the larger viewing public and acceptable both to would-be federal regulators and, especially, to state and local review boards. These latter groups loom large in Prince's account, though, as he admits, getting a systematic grasp on their varied operations and effects on the shifting patterns of violence on screen is difficult. Despite citing many telling examples of local action, the study begins and ends in Hollywood itself with the interactions that produced motion pictures. More specifically, while Prince recognizes the importance of the behaviors depicted on-screen—of gangsters or g-men, soldiers or psychopaths—what most concerns him are the visual rhetoric and conventions of screen violence and how institutionally and imaginatively they came to be. Ultimately, this book aims at nothing less than refashioning the way we approach the "classical" in film studies and, in the process, positing violence as a major element defining that history.

Insofar as the critical wedding of institutional histories and stylistic innovations can frame understandings of brutality in Hollywood cinema, Prince adeptly accomplishes his objectives. However, questions arise about this excellently researched and acutely drawn framework that bear crucially on many of the claims being made and their underlying conceptualization of film violence. Prince himself explains the parameters of his study at the opening and closing of the book, when he distinguishes his project from those works that address more the "sociological" or "social" history of violence referenced in films or the relation between on-screen actions and historical events. Quite generously, he allows for the value of these other approaches but maintains that his priority "and the subject of the book is the 'movie' in *movie* violence" (4). He privileges cinematic design and filmmaking form while professing concern that discussions of social or historical significance relegate violence on screen to a secondary and dependent status. Ironically, the resulting historical account reveals how the PCA—particularly in their primary, preproduction reviews of story outlines and scripts—and local would-be censors were often blind to these very stylistic concerns or at least a step behind the filmmakers and producers who innovated them.

At issue here for analysts of violence is the very meaning of "movies." Film style is crucial and, in studies of cinematic brutality as in other areas, relatively underexamined. Prince emphasizes the visual throughout his analysis and probably his most original chapter, on the "poetics of screen violence," closely examines what he terms the "substitutional" strategies of filmmakers striving to include violence in their pictures without doing so in the directly visual ways the PCA deemed objectionable. To foreground visual style and conventions while comparatively underplaying narrative violations and brutality or the wider histories in which they operated is nevertheless to limit a conception of movies, especially over time. In fact, the very distinction between visual stylistics and the thematic or descriptive content apprehensible through narrative is a murky one. (More than once, Prince makes this distinction still more problematic by juxtaposing the stylistic and the ideological, meaning behaviors or narratives, as if stylistic and formal concerns were somehow separate from the realm of ideology.) Filmmakers and film viewers both work on multiple levels, or axes, of meaning simultaneously, certainly with regards to a given motion picture, and this diversity of means of expression, storytelling, and reception does not fit readily into a static hierarchy that positions the non-direct as a lesser or diminished modality. Prince does expand his view occasionally, like when noting the palpable "threat of violence" (166) accompanying more direct images of action in *Brute Force* (1947); and more generally, his close attention to PCA debates that revolved around the social and

moral acceptability of narrative descriptions would seem to affirm the multidimensionality of motion pictures as a social medium of visual storytelling. There is, however, no broader imperative here to approach violence in cinema along multiple and intersecting axes including the stylistic, the industrial, the referential, the narrative, the moral, and the social. Most of these axes are recognized in *Classical Film Violence* but the relations between them are not explored and their changing applicability to individual films, controversies, or the social role of Hollywood cinema over time is not fully explained.

The subject of "violence," likewise, remains complex. Violence as graphic display of bodily trauma is a practicable baseline for approaching violence on screen. The argument that the inviolability of the body was incrementally challenged and eroded during the classical period (and, even more, since the 1960s) is most persuasive, as are the detailed discussions of changing visualizations of the effects on and damage to bodies by guns and knives. Why the individual body possesses this sanctity is left unexplained, however, as is a fuller rationale (beyond research studies that are referenced as authoritative but unelaborated) for the generally greater emotional effect on viewers produced by images of the puncturing or penetrating of the body by knives than by the putatively less immediate violations of gunplay. Largely left out of this corporeal calculus is the atmospheric, emotional, and psychic violence frequently generated by acts of substitutional poetics as well as narrative turns and conflicts. The assumption about directly visualized and stylized behavior being "worse" and more objectionable than indirect forms of violence, which accords with that of the PCA, remains mostly unquestioned. Also excluded from consideration here are behavioral or stylistic conventions that were typically unexamined by the PCA because of prevailing social morality or cultural values of the "Classical" era. Thus largely ignored are instances of the systematic violence of marginalization in the representation of non-White races, especially African Americans, or the suggested violence against women in Hollywood productions of the period. James Cagney's mashing a grapefruit in Mae Clarke's face in *The Public Enemy* (1931) is passingly mentioned (100), for example, but one is left to wonder what related kinds of violence the scene epitomizes in classical cinema that are not developed here.

When the reader draws together these shifting concepts, the idea of "movie violence" feels doubly unstable. Prince considers *Classical Film Violence* as a kind of "prequel" to *Savage Cinema* and, by extension, "classical" film violence as leading "inexorably" toward the ultraviolence of the 1960s and years since. He presents the longer history of Hollywood film violence as linear, in other words, with the institutional and creative negotiations of the 1930s through early 60s as illuminating and inevitable precursors to the explosion of violence in the latter decade that many have viewed as a kind of originary moment for today's film brutishness. That Prince turns to earlier films and, especially, debates within the industry and among filmmakers is undeniably significant for any broader effort to construct an archaeology of film violence. But in doing so he retains and reinforces the familiar narrative of the 1960s as a singular turning point between classical and New Hollywood—a historiographic narrative that has been both advanced and challenged from many perspectives.

Even according to Prince's argument, the impact of violence in the 1960s cannot be fully appreciated without attention to the layered social and cultural contexts of the era, so it therefore appears incongruous to focus at other historical moments solely on industry debates over—and the stylistic plenitude, variety, and duration of—on-screen carnage. As presented here, the PCA was established and its concern over the representations of violent behaviors commenced in the 1930s as part of a "larger struggle" over who controlled cinema; then, in the 1960s, the office was shut down during another period of change in Hollywood and, more, contestation of the place of cinema in a changing society. Presumably other occasions in between warrant similarly layered attention. The combat films of World War II are indeed presented in such terms, but, as elsewhere in this study, combat violence appears as a kind of exceptional category that upholds more general rules guiding the longer trajectory of mayhem. Put differently, just as *Classical Film Violence* begins and ends with social and institutional framings of stylistic innovation and industrial debate, the other instances of movie violence adduced in the study similarly seem both reflective and constitutive of the ongoing negotiations over the shape of Hollywood cinema and its place in framing and determining social debates and cultural values.

Among Prince's overarching points is the invaluable realization that during the classical period, particularly the 1930s when the PCA was established, "violence" as a term or idea was "not part of industry or public discourse as it is today" (32). Individual acts or "categories of reference," like antisocial or criminal behavior, which might retrospectively be viewed as violent were discussed, but it was not until the 1960s that violence emerged as "a supra-category, demanding a special regulatory philosophy and policy" and "disentangled from issues of behavior" (254, 258). On one level, this evolution seems to support the author's underlying belief that classical film violence leads importantly and inevitably to the pyrotechnics and preoccupations of 1960s violence. On another, the disjunction between individual brutish acts and violence, writ large, urges exactly the sort of historical inquiry into the shifting nature and meaning of cinematic and social violence that he wants to bracket. Mostly, though, the insight conveys how *Classical Film Violence*, with its originally researched and perceptively analyzed claims and questions, bristles with ideas about its contentious topic that constitute a great leap forward in our understandings of film violence and of Hollywood itself.

J. DAVID SLOCUM is Associate Dean in the Graduate School of Arts and Science at New York University, where he teaches cinema studies. His latest book is an edited collection, *Rebel Without a Cause: Approaches to a Maverick Masterwork* (SUNY Press, 2005).

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Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903–1967

By Susan Courtney. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. $70.00 cloth; $26.95 paper. 373 pages.

At the opening of Miranda July's stunning debut film, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), a white man and an African American woman are in the throes of a divorce. Although the camera unavoidably registers the dark skin of the wife and the couple's two children, at no point is race ever discussed in the film, certainly not as the cause of the breakup. Have we turned a corner? Probably not.

But if in fact a new era has begun, one in which Hollywood is not hysterical about interracial romance, then we have come a long way. In *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation*, Susan Courtney traces America's fascination with sex and race through six decades of film history. It is a bizarre and disturbing history, from the first interracial screen kiss in Edwin S. Porter's minute-long *What Happened in the Tunnel* (1903) to the earnest handing over of the white daughter to her black love object in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967). Again and again Hollywood titillates audiences with mixed couples at the same time that it relies on a handful of strategies to reassure audiences that the old hierarchies will and should remain intact. And as is so often the case in screen history, the purest expression of Hollywood's attitude toward a vexed subject can be found in D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

Courtney builds her argument around a handful of key films, including *Pinky* (1949), *Imitation of Life* (1934), *Island in the Sun* (1957), *Sayonara* (1957), *Night of the Quarter Moon* (1959), and *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1958), as well as *Birth of a Nation* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. She makes passing references to a wide range of other films that touch on racial mixing, including several early films by Griffith that paved the way for *Birth*. Because Courtney has tracked down so many relevant films, I was surprised by the absence of Martin Ritt's *Paris Blues* (1961), in which a black and a white musician in Paris have affairs with American schoolteachers—one black, one white—vacationing in France. *Paris Blues* begins by strongly suggesting that Paul Newman will pair up with Diahann Carroll and Sidney Poitier with Joanne Woodward. Early in the shooting, however, the filmmakers lost their nerve and color-coded the couples according to more conventional standards. Perhaps Hollywood was not ready for a serious representation of interracial romance, even in the Bohemian milieu of expatriate musicians. Not until six years later would *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* dress up the subject for mass consumption and although the film takes place in San Francisco during the Summer of Love, the film turns that city into a fortress of white male privilege.

Courtney's close readings of individual films are smart and nuanced, but she also has much to say about a broad range of other material. She pairs her discussion of *Birth of a Nation* with the media's treatment of Jack Johnson, whose mauling of white opponents was recruited to paint him as the defiler of white women. The myth of the black male rapist, an essential element in Courtney's history, was firmly in place and ripe for the picking when Griffith began work on *Birth*.

Courtney devotes an entire chapter to the ban by the Production Code Administration (PCA) on what it called, in typically inelegant prose, "sex relationships between the white and black races." Unearthing some startling correspondence about films at the beginning and end of its prohibition against race mixing, Courtney shows how the PCA set the stage for films that strategically imposed blackness on fair-skinned actors cast as African Americans.

In the final chapter, she combines a thorough analysis of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* with readings of Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* and the Supreme Court's declaration in *Loving v. Virginia* that laws prohibiting interracial marriage are unconstitutional. All three of these "texts" appeared in the space of less than a year, from June 1967 through March 1968, and all worked their way to an acceptance of racial mixing *only* by rigidly reasserting conventional hierarchies of gender and sex.

Indeed, the book's central argument is that Hollywood's stories of interracial romance are inextricably linked to anxieties about gender roles. *The Birth of a Nation*, for example, displaced the sufferings of men threatened by a new social and political order onto a white woman threatened by a black rapist at the same time that Jack Johnson was the vehicle for a similar set of displacements. In several films, exotic women of color—including Asian women in *Sayonara* as well as the mulattos impersonated by Julie London in *The Night of the Quarter Moon* and Natalie Wood in *Kings Go Forth* (1958)—are more "naturally" feminine and thus more capable of tending to vulnerable white men undergoing crises of masculinity during or after a war. And the finale of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* ultimately buttresses the authority of the white patriarch, both in the narrative's climax and in the media's deification of Spencer Tracy, who became inseparable from the patriarch he played in a film released shortly after his death.

Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation started life as Susan Courtney's Ph.D. thesis at Berkeley. She dedicates the book to the late Michael Rogin, who directed her dissertation. Anyone who knows Rogin's work will not be surprised by her conclusions, even though many of her insights take his work in new directions. Courtney has also engaged productively with writings on race and masculinity by several other mentors from Berkeley, Linda Williams, Carol J. Clover, and Kaja Silverman.

The finished product is clearly the result of many productive hours in the archives. Courtney compellingly links her documents to the racial and sexual ideologies of the American cinema. I am especially impressed by her regular demonstrations of how cinematic space and lighting are crucial if not essential to Hollywood's discourses of race. A large number of carefully chosen frame grabs appear throughout the book, illustrating, for example, how the "white" view of a

city from on high is consistently denied to black characters in several films and how *Pinky* repeatedly associates Jeanne Crain with blackness by placing her in shadows or by burying her slim pale body in the capacious embrace of the African American Ethel Waters.

The book ends with an especially convincing defense of a race-based film criticism. To all those who insist that scholars have made too much of race, that it is time to move on, that we may even be perpetuating the racial ideologies we are trying to expose, Courtney has this response: only by confronting our own spectatorial relationships to Hollywood's scenarios of miscegnation "can we hope to ever safely forget them."

Long after 1967, Courtney's *terminus ante quem*, mainstream films still shy away from sexually mixing the races. Denzel Washington never kisses Julia Roberts in *The Pelican Brief* (1993). *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), by contrast, is a proudly independent film and it can delight its small audience by purposefully turning its back on the subject. But several other indies of recent vintage, including *Far From Heaven* (2002), *Lone Star* (1996), and *Monster's Ball* (2001), suggest that Americans are still extremely anxious about racial mixing. Even if these films preach that we ought *not* to be anxious, their very preachiness suggests that the old fantasies of miscegenation still have their power. Courtney's book is a thorough dissection of those fantasies and of how they have maintained that power.

KRIN GABBARD is Professor of Comparative Literature and English at SUNY Stony Brook. His most recent book is *Black Magic: White Hollywood and African American Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2004).

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Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys, and Sopranos

By Peter Bondanella. New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2004. $29.95 cloth; $18.95 paper. 352 pages.

"Color est e pluribus unus [many colors blend into one]": this phrase is used by Peter Bondanella to describe his approach to the subject of representation in Hollywood film, from the silent era to the present. As Bondanella's title implies, that subject is Italian Americans and their representation through various familiar "surrogate" disguises. The subtitle of the book reflects not only these colorful representations, but also the structure of the work itself: "Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys, and Sopranos." Bondanella is not concerned with how these representations differ from real Italian Americans; his is a history of Hollywood Italians who are "far fewer in number [yet] more vivid in our collective imagination." Clearly, this book is not a simplistic compendium of Italian-American stereotypes; it engages the reader with its subject matter by acknowledging the multiplicity of issues involved in ethnic representation in American cinema.

Bondanella is a noted scholar of the history of Italian cinema and how Italians have represented themselves on film. His *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (Continuum International, 2001) is the standard history of Italian film in English. With this current work, Bondanella draws attention to the Italian immigrant experience and the process of assimilation as it is depicted in American films. At the same time, he acknowledges that many of these depictions "quite naturally embodied the ambivalent views of Italians that Americans of recent and much earlier vintage held towards these new and colorful arrivals—they were different." Bondanella takes a critical stance that is both sympathetic to the various representations he discusses and discerning in its examination of the sociocultural context for some of them.

Each chapter is organized chronologically along historical lines. Bondanella begins with the silent era and its depiction of the Italian immigrants and extends his analysis to the postmodern Hollywood version of the *famiglia* in the popular HBO series "The Sopranos." The first section, titled "Dagos," offers a Hollywood history of Italian American immigration and the immigrant experience, describing its numerous personifications in such films as *The Italian* (1915), *Christ in Concrete* (1949), *The Rose Tattoo* (1955), *Marty* (1955), and others that effectively (some more so than others) portray the Italian American experience. Bondanella uses his first chapter to discuss not only the stereotypes that resulted from the massive Italian immigration during the late nineteenth century (coincidental with the development of the film industry), but also the depictions of Italian Americans as an industrious working class trying to achieve the American dream of success.

Many of the films that Bondanella discusses are about the ethnic experience in "Little Italies" in American cinema, such as those found in the films *Mean Streets* (1973), *Moonstruck* (1987), and *Big Night* (1996). As the author states, these communities define Little Italy as "a setting of the mind that inspires nostalgia." In the modern world, where the process of assimilation has become much more distilled and extensive, Italian Americans are now CEOs, jurists, writers, and university presidents. Bondanella observes that the Hollywood Italians, in contrast, are crowded into much more "limited locations, occupations and social values." It is on this limited scope of representation that Bondanella concentrates throughout the book.

The next two sections examine both the Hollywood Italian prizefighter and the Hollywood Italian lover respectively. Again, each chapter progresses from early cinematic depictions of Italian American ethnicity to more recent ones. In "Palookas," Bondanella shows how many Hollywood Italian films—such as, for instance, *Raging Bull* (1980) and *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956)—focus on lower-class characters with little education. (The term "Palooka" is derived from a cartoon character of the 1930s and became associated with a certain violent style of boxing.) In this section, Bondanella provides a cogent critique of films ranging from Michael Curtiz's *Kid Galahad* (1937) to the ultimate "Palooka" represented by Sylvester Stallone in the *Rocky* series. He emphasizes that this ethnic type often represents a Hollywood

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Italian version of the American success story, showcasing a character who, through hard work and determination, succeeds in breaking away from his lower-class environment.

Bondanella next turns his attention to the Hollywood Italian lover, the "Romeos" of the American screen, beginning with their most successful representative in silent cinema: Rudolph Valentino. His image, which provided a template for other Hollywood Italian lovers to build upon, encompassed seductive charm, sexual prowess, and physical action. Yet it also, as Bondanella points out, represents the "Other"—an escape from the everyday, an exoticism that ran counter to the All-American image of masculinity of the time. Bondanella discusses how this ethnic type was often reinvented by Hollywood to fit such second-generation Italian American personalities as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and John Travolta.

The largest portion of *Hollywood Italians* is devoted to the most pervasive and popular of the figures: the gangster, as personified by the term "wise guy" and, of course, appearing in its most current manifestation in "The Sopranos." Bondanella links this image to its historic past in the late nineteenth century, when the association of Italian immigrant criminal gangs began, and looks at the depiction of the Italian screen gangster in the silent era in films such as *The Black Hand* (1906) and *The Racket* (1927) before moving to the early sound versions of this representation in the seminal gangster films *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932). The author provides an in-depth and intelligent analysis of Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy, examining the films as a metaphor both for America and for the dissolution of family values. He concludes with another instructive reading from "The Sopranos," which he sees as the high-water mark of the depiction of Hollywood Italians in the movies (primarily because David Chase, the series creator, treats these Italian Americans as the "norm by which everything is measured"). The series takes place in a "Sopranoland" where Italian Americans appear in almost every profession from mobsters to psychiatry, "completely assimilated into the American mainstream."

As Bondanella notes about the Latin phrase used to open this review, it originally referred to the making of a salad in which all of the ingredients combine to create the dish itself, but where the individual ingredients can always be identified. Hence his emphasis that Italian Americans remain an ethnic group in American culture despite their successful assimilation: "In their most sublime representations, as in *The Godfather* trilogy and *The Sopranos*, they have captured the popular imagination and even the admiration of generations of Americans, while providing Hollywood with some of its greatest folklore." A thoroughly enjoyable work, *Hollywood Italians* dispenses with theoretical analysis in favor of an historical study of film representation geared toward the general reader as well as the film scholar.

RONALD WILSON teaches in the Department of Theatre and Film at the University of Kansas.

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Silent Film Sound

By Rick Altman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. $50.00 cloth. 462 pages.

Rick Altman has given us a magnum opus, a work big in every sense—the culmination of a major scholar's decades of research and speculation. *Silent Film Sound* provides not only the most complete and complex account of the aural dimension of silent cinema, but is also a stunningly original work of film history. Altman supplies new information and concepts to scholars concerned with either musical accompaniment or the role of sound in film generally. But the audience for this book will not be confined to specialists because it would not be wrong to call *Silent Film Sound* the best single-volume history of American silent film. Admittedly, with its specific focus, Altman's work does not deal in detail with many key aspects of silent film. Nonetheless, he explores film sound so systematically that he touches upon nearly every aspect of silent cinema in the United States. Ultimately Altman provides not just an account of film music in the silent era, but a history of the performative dimension of silent film—film as both a performance offered by showman exhibitors and the audience's experience of film viewing (and hearing!).

The title holds a central paradox: *Silent* Film *Sound*. The physical separation between silent film and its sound accompaniment has made it simultaneously more difficult to research and potentially richer to think about. Whereas sound film marries visual and audio in a single text, during the silent era sound and image occupied different spaces and followed different protocols, perhaps even possessing different ontologies. Analysis of film sound may still be neglected in comparison to its visual aspects (an imbalance Altman and his colleagues and students at the University of Iowa have done much to redress over the last decades), but at least during the sound era, sound is readily available to scholars as a physical part of the film.

Although the importance (or at least the existence) of sound accompaniment during the silent era has long been acknowledged, silent film sound remains beyond a scholar's direct access. Surviving scores for silent films have provided the major source for histories of silent film sound—and in recent years some excellent scholarship has been devoted to their examination (Martin Miller Marks' *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies 1895–1924* [Oxford University Press, 1997] is an outstanding example of this scholarship). But, even with a score in hand, reconstructing the sound element of a silent film remains a complex business. The fact is that scores never existed for many films, especially during the cinema's first two decades, the era to which Altman devotes his most penetrating attention. Where a score for a specific film does exist, there is no guarantee that it conveys the music actually played at all (or even most) of the film's screenings, since major picture palaces often commissioned scores from the manager of their orchestra, while smalltown pianists were likely to follow their own impulses and improvise.

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But the elusive nature of silent film sound constitutes more than a research headache for Altman. It also defines its specific power. Music entails a unique performance—a sort of Benjaminian aura—that mechanical reproduction undercuts, if it does not destroy. While making recovery of the performance problematic for scholars, a live performance supplies a powerful experience for its audience. The aleatory, improvised, hard-to-control, and endlessly varied nature of this live dimension makes the sound of silent film especially challenging for scholars to reconstruct, demanding new research methods and modes of speculation. Altman demonstrates these in detail.

Silent Film Sound proposes a detailed periodization of American cinema from 1895 to 1930, a periodization based in sound practice that supplements and refines previous periodizations that arose from the development of film's visual rhetoric or the organization of the film industry. Not only was film's relation to sound still undefined in the era of cinema's invention and emergence, no consistent understanding of *film* had yet appeared. Thus, Altman begins his chronology with what he calls film's "crisis of identity" during cinema's first decade. I must admit that I dislike the use of this 1950s psychological term. It implies a loss of identity when what is in fact at stake is the process of fashioning a *new* identity out of a number of competing models and sources. I prefer André Gaudreault's description of cinema's multiple and intermedial background during this period, gradually giving way to a growing sense of film's uniqueness through the establishment of new institutions around 1907, such as the international scope of film production and distribution at Pathé Frères, the emergence of trade journals, and the growth of theaters dedicated primarily to the exhibition of films. However, Altman's discussion of the competing practices that initially adopted film and provided models for its use of sound tells basically the same story as Gaudreault does—of a cobbled-together identity emerging out of competing discourses. Guided by Charles Musser's pioneering work on the diverse media ecology from which American cinema emerged, Altman's treatment of sound supplements earlier research while making the process of film gaining an identity especially clear and vivid.

In its first decade, film music emerged from a complex "soundscape" that Altman details lovingly, including stage music, vaudeville, band concerts, the eclectic local opera houses, and the emerging culture of the phonograph. These practices offered competing models for musical accompaniment, while film drew its forms of address and representation not only from stage plays and vaudeville programs, but also from the travel lecture and the fairground. Music in film's first decades did more than "illustrate" the film sonically. Music provided fairground ballyhoo, serving to draw attention from by-passers on the street (according to Altman, in the nickelodeon era this ballyhoo function initially played a more important role than accompanying the film itself, which not infrequently ran silently). Like vaudeville or burlesque musicians, film accompanists underlined gags and pratfalls in a humorous style that became increasingly problematic as early films moved from an almost exclusive focus on comedy to more serious, character-driven dramas. The earlier model emphasized musical "effects"—sometimes realistic, sometime humorous—producing a discontinuous form of accompaniment, quite different from the absorptive modes that characterize the film scores of the 1920s. The playing of popular songs (and the business of selling sheet music) not only provided tunes for film accompaniment, but also developed during the nickelodeon era into an attraction in its own right, the "illustrated song." Singers of varied abilities performed songs to the visual accompaniment of specially designed lantern slides (whose vivid colors and often bizarre compositional schemes are exemplified in Altman's book by color illustrations drawn from the extraordinary Maran Collection).

Thus a series of competing models shaped the music offered by nickelodeons and Altman emphasizes its diverse intentions and effects. In the 1910s, American cinema underwent a broad and gradual transformation, which in my work I have described as the process of narrative integration. Altman shows that film music underwent a similar standardization, emerging primarily as an unobtrusive underlining of the dramatic and psychological aspects of a film's story. This standardization was accomplished largely through a new discourse on film music promoted by trade journals. But, as Altman shows, it also interacted with many changes in exhibition (including the addition of a second projector in most theaters, which eliminated the necessity of a pause between reels, increasing the continuous flow for multiple-reel film). This transformation of film music into the handmaiden of a new character-driven, absorptive narrative cinema involved a retraining of musicians in both technique and repertoire—as well as a transformation in audience expectations and behavior. The new musical accompaniment, with its continuous, coherent performance and its cues directing audience attention and emotional investments, also served a disciplinary function, suppressing audience conversation and distraction. However, Altman's account of music accompaniment in the 1920s does not sketch a simple movement from the carnivalesque regime of early cinema to the standardized and gentrified Classical Hollywood Cinema. Music for the cinema program in the 1920s eventually reintroduced many of the sounds and musical devices that the campaign for standardization had struggled to eliminate. However, this reintroduction involved, as Altman puts it, a codification and redistribution of these elements across the varied cinema program. Sound practices differed for one-reel comedies, dramatic features, orchestra overtures, newsreels, or organ sing-alongs, allowing a range of styles other than the dominant narrativized approach used for dramatic features.

Although the development of musical accompaniment provides the spine of *Silent Film Sound*, Altman remains true to his title by detailing sound practices other than music. The lecture tradition exerted a strong influence on early cinema, spawning a variety of film lecturers, from traveling exhibitors like Lyman Howe who narrated a varied program, to the nickelodeon lecturers who aided audience comprehension

of more complex narrative films. Altman gives a thorough account of talking-film practices popular during the early nickelodeon period—including devices that synchronized phonograph recordings to films as well as troupes of actors trained to speak dialogue behind the screen—and explains their brief period of popularity. Perhaps most notably, Altman pays close attention to the complex history of sound effects in silent cinema, beginning with the trap drummer "catching" action on screen with his drum and cymbals and eventually adding a variety of whistles and percussion devices. This specialization expanded into a whole corps of sound technicians operating behind the screen with a range of devices to imitate thunder, rainfall, horse hooves, locomotives, musket fire, and cannon roar. These devices eventually became mechanized as sound-effect machines and later were absorbed into the mighty Wurlitzer organ that constituted much of 1920s film accompaniment. The rise and fall of sound effects in film accompaniment paralleled the development from the more discontinuous musical effects of the nickelodeon era to the more narratively integrated and continuous music of the late 1910s and 20s.

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